

**PURITANISM, ROMANTICISM, AND REASON
AS REFLECTED IN THREE MAIN CHARACTERS OF
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S THE SCARLET LETTER**

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Abstract

This writing is to identify the description and form of Puritanism, Romanticism and Reason found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Method used in this research is descriptive qualitative through library research with dynamic structuralism. Furthermore, the result expected is to find out description through Puritanism, Romanticism and Reason analysis on the three characters in *The Scarlet Letter*. Puritanism in *The Scarlet Letter* is showed by the society condition where people have pure transcendental relationship to the God. Romanticism is revealed by love relationship, individual freedom, passionate and happiness that related to overwhelming feeling. Reason in *The Scarlet Letter* is depicted by the three characters' struggle in pursuing happiness with their reasonable actions even though the society has not been able to accept it.

Keywords: Puritanism, Romanticism, Reason, Scarlet Letter

Abstrak

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui gambaran dan bentuk Puritanisme, Romantisme dan Alasan pada novel The Scarlet Letter karya Nathaniel Hawthorne. Metode yang digunakan dalam tulisan ini adalah metode deskriptif kualitatif melalui studi kepustakaan dengan teori strukturalisme dinamik. Selain itu, hasil yang diharapkan adalah untuk mengetahui gambaran Puritanisme, Romantisme dan Alasan pada tiga karakter utama dalam The Scarlet Letter. Puritanisme dalam The Scarlet Letter ditunjukkan dengan kondisi masyarakat yang memiliki hubungan transendental murni kepada Tuhan. Romantisme diungkapkan lewat hubungan cinta, kebebasan individu, kegairahan dan kebahagiaan yang berkaitan dengan perasaan yang luar biasa. Alasan yang muncul di novel ini digambarkan oleh perjuangan tiga karakter utama dalam menggapai kebahagiaan melalui tindakan beralasan yang menurut mereka sudah tepat dilakukan meskipun masyarakat belum mampu menerimanya.

Kata kunci: Puritanisme, Romantisisme, Alasan, Huruf Merah Marun

A. Introduction

The Scarlet Letter attained an immediate and lasting success because it addressed spiritual and moral issues from a uniquely American standpoint. In 1850, adultery was an extremely risqué subject, but because Hawthorne had the support of the New England literary establishment, it passed easily into the realm of appropriate reading. *The Scarlet Letter* represents the height of Hawthorne's literary genius; dense with terse descriptions.

However, it is obvious that *The Scarlet Letter* is in depth a story for adults because of the suggestion of allegory. It is a form of imaginative literature or spoken utterance constructed in such a way that its readers or listeners are encouraged to look for meanings hidden beneath the literal of fiction (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1974:132). *The Scarlet Letter* presents three main characters representing three different philosophies throughout the moral declining era of the seventeenth century New England as the background of the story giving an idea of human tragedy. Hawthorne reveals his concern to this moral decline with a somber and ironical tone.

Since *The Scarlet Letter* is an allegory which delivers meanings beneath the novel, the paper is then going to prove that this story suggests

philosophies: Puritanism, Romanticism, and Reason seen from three main characters of *The Scarlet Letter* focusing more on finding freedom of human nature in terms of woman's instincts underlying love relationship between a man and a woman. In addition, for the scope of the study, this paper focuses merely on the suggestive meanings of the three main characters in order to put across those ideas in relation to Puritan society and ideas of exposed instincts as a form of freedom in human nature. Therefore, this writing is aimed at identifying the kinds of Puritanism, Romanticism and Reason represented by the three main characters in *The Scarlet Letter*.

The approach applied here is dynamic structuralism as proposed by Mukarovsky that placed great emphasis on the dynamic tension between literature and society in the artistic product (Selden, 1986). Structuralism also views literature as a dynamic system that changes and shifts from time to time. Therefore, this approach can include biographical sketch of the author and social setting as background of knowledge. Library research is employed in this paper using the novel *The Scarlet Letter* as a main book to discuss.

B. Biographical Sketch of Nathaniel Hawthorne

Since the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850, Nathaniel Hawthorne has been recognized as one of America's most important writers, both a "romancer" who probed inner mysteries and a "realist" who assessed the American character and experience. Born in Massachusetts on the Fourth of July, 1804, he was the descendant of Puritan worthies and the son of a ship's captain.

From 1821 to 1825, Hawthorne was a student at Bowdoin College, graduating in the middle of his class of thirty-eight. From the Scottish philosophers, he absorbed the concepts of faculty psychology which would recur in his fiction.

Like his heroine Hester, Hawthorne emerges from confrontation with a self-righteous society as an individual of integrity, passion, and moral superiority. Hawthorne passed away on May 19, 1864 in Plymouth, New Hampshire after a long period of illness in which he suffered severe bouts of dementia. Emerson described his life with the words "painful solitude." Hawthorne maintained a strong friendship with Franklin Pierce, but otherwise had few intimates and little engagement with any sort of social life. His works remain notable for their

treatment of guilt and the complexities of moral choices.

C. Social Background of The Story

One reason of Hawthorne's choosing the seventeenth century New England as the background of the story *The Scarlet Letter* is that this is an era of moral decline which can be a suitable one for his masterpiece of a human tragedy. Hawthorne reveals his concern to this moral decline in *The Scarlet Letter* with a somber and ironic tone.

While portraying the declining Puritan New England as the background of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne relieves the adultery of Hester and Arthur Dimmesdale and shows his sympathy to them by rebuking the ill-conceived marriage and the severe persecution of the Puritan society.

The Scarlet Letter is set in the mid-1600s in Boston, which had been founded only about two decades earlier. In 1630 hundreds of newly arrived Puritans established a number of settlements in Massachusetts. The Puritan movement began in the 1500s among people who believed that the Church of England was too much influenced by the Crown and the Catholic Church. As Protestants, the Puritans rejected the belief that divine authority is channeled through any one particular person, such as a pope.

Puritans believed that people had the power to receive spiritual enlightenment directly from the teachings of the Bible. The kings and queens of England did not always agree with the Puritans. When Charles I closed Parliament in 1629 and pressured Puritan members to conform, some Puritans traveled to the American colonies to gain religious freedom and establish new lives.

These residents of Boston in the mid-1600s were much as Hawthorne depicts them—hard-working and devoted to their way of life. Their society had been carved out for them by John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts and a resident of Boston. As a leader of the first residents of the colony, he established a government based on a combination of religious and civil ideals. The colony was intended to be an ideal Christian community.

D. Puritanism, Romanticism, and Reason As Reflected in Three Main Characters of *The Scarlet Letter*

Before analyzing of what philosophies discussed in *The Scarlet Letter*, three main characters of *The Scarlet Letter* are worth introducing as an important matter to give a better understanding toward what actually each character stands for. For the reason that *The Scarlet*

Letter is an allegory, readers should therefore find meanings hidden within the novel through those three main characters that are as follows:

- **Hester Prynne:** the main character of ***The Scarlet Letter***. Hester is the mother of Pearl, and is the woman who must wear the scarlet letter. She is the wife of Roger Chillingworth, but Arthur Dimmesdale is Pearl's father. Hester suffers the public humiliation of having to wear the letter "A" on her chest. She lives in Boston until her death.
- **Arthur Dimmesdale:** an eminent minister in Boston and also the father of Pearl. He is a tortured man who constantly places his hand over his heart when agitated. His health is quite bad, and it thanks to Roger Chillingworth's potions that he is able to stay alive. Dimmesdale admits to being Pearl's father at the very end of the novel, and reveals that he has a scarlet letter branded into his flesh (this is a symbolic moment; there is no proof that he actually has a scarlet letter branded onto his flesh). He dies upon the scaffold while holding Hester's hand.
- **Roger Chillingworth:** Hester's husband from the Netherlands.

Chillingworth arrives in Boston the day that Hester is publicly shamed and forced to wear the scarlet letter. He vows revenge on the father of Pearl, and soon thereafter moves in with Arthur Dimmesdale. His revenge is stifled at the end when Dimmesdale reveals that he is Pearl's father before dying. Chillingworth, having lost the object of his hatred, dies soon thereafter.

E. Hester Prynne and Her Instinct as a Form of Individual Freedom in Terms of American Romanticism Focusing on Love Relationship

Instinct is the inherent disposition of a [living organism](#) toward a particular [behavior](#). Instincts are unlearned, inherited [fixed action patterns](#) of responses or reactions to certain kinds of stimuli (www.wikipedia.org). Instinct is a manifestation of the mental world and the subjective experience altogether detached from reality. Instinct consists of two processes, namely the reflex action and the action of imagination (Kusharyanto, 2008:49).

Reflex action as seen by Hester Prynne when “*the eyes of the wrinkled scholar gazed so intensely upon her,*

that Hester Prynne clasped her hands over her heart, dreading lest he should read the secret there at once”(SL, 1990: 80).

Shedid the same thing again when the elders intend to take her child Pearl, spontaneously. “*Hester caught hold of Pearl, and drew forcibly into her arms, confronting the old Puritan magistrate with almost a fierce expression*” (SL, 1990: 112).

The Romantics sought Nature's glorious diversity of detail -- especially its moral and emotional relation to mankind. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the emotional relation to mankind is represented by a love affair done by Prynne to seek for true warmth in the heart. For the Romantics, warmth of heart was found and indeed enhanced by a communion with Nature. The heart has reasons that Reason is not equipped to understand. The heart was a source of knowledge -- the location of ideas "felt" as sensations rather than thoughts. Intuition was equated with that which men feel strongly. Men could learn by experiment or by logical process—but men could learn more in intuitive flashes and feelings, by learning to trust their 'instincts'. The Romantics distrusted calculation and stressed the limitations of scientific knowledge. The rationality of science fails to apprehend the variety and fullness of reality. Rational analysis

destroys the naïve experience of the stream of sensations and in this violation, leads men into error. Thus, it is vividly proven in *The Scarlet Letter* that, though Prynne is bound tightly by the marital law, she falls into an error deed – a wrong doing – by committing adultery although it is somehow a form of her love freedom to express her instinct.

In another view of Hester, she believed that love given to Dimmesdale is not blind love that indulges their feeling as she said to Dimmesdale “*What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said to each other! Hast you forgotten it?*” (SL, 1990: 186)

F. Arthur Dimmesdale as Symbol of Puritan

Puritanism was the religion practiced by the people of colonial Boston, the setting for Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. The author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, utilizes imagery to convey that Arthur Dimmesdale, a Puritan minister of the town, does indeed represent the Puritan society and not only the round character that can be viewed on the surface level. This is seen through the imagery and symbolism of hypocrisy, Dimmesdale as a reverend, a supposedly trusted person in community.

Hawthorne parallels the hypocrisy of Dimmesdale to that of Puritan society. Hawthorne describes Dimmesdale as, “a viler companion of the vilest, the worst of sinners,” even though Dimmesdale is seen as the most holy man in the Puritan community. Puritan society was supposed to be a utopian society and do away with their English traditions, but instead was very strict and highly religious. Similarly, as Dimmesdale was supposed to be holy, yet they --- Puritans and Dimmesdale as figured out in the story--- both were hypocritical. Dimmesdale also portrays the hypocrisy of Puritan society by not initially taking his place on the scaffold.

“Ye have both been here before, but I was not with you... and we will stand all three together.” While Dimmesdale hid his sin at the first scaffold scene, so did the Puritans when they colonize.

The Puritans left England to flee from religious intolerance, but when they settled in the colonies, they had no religious tolerance for people with different religious beliefs, which led to religious persecution of those other than Puritans. Hawthorne also implies that Puritanism was an evil concept that mistakenly combined religion and law in its society, which eventually led to its failure ---- this becomes one of important reasons of why Hawthorne set *The Scarlet Letter* in the 17th century

as a portrait of failure of religion and government union in the nation. As a matter of fact, Hawthorne saw evidence that Jefferson and Madison in the 19th century somehow made the state become the church. And for this reason, idea of separation between the separation between religion and state affairs came up ----. From the time Dimmesdale hides his sin of *The Scarlet Letter* on his chest, it develops and its affects are not stopped until he confesses his sin. Through the symbols of hypocrisy, Christ, and *The Scarlet Letter* we can see that Hawthorne uses Dimmesdale as a symbolic character of Puritan society.

The character of Dimmesdale represents the rise and fall of Puritan society, through the imagery of *The Scarlet Letter* on his chest. Similarly, Dimmesdale cannot truly live until he confesses his sin, but when he finally confesses he dies. Dimmesdale's death symbolically marks the beginning of American History and the end of "colonial history", just as Christ's death marked the beginning of the Christian church. Dimmesdale speaks out against adultery and commits it, the Puritans demand religious tolerance, but do not give it. Also, Dimmesdale mirrored Jesus Christ in His teaching that to save your life you must lose it. Dimmesdale goes from having, "his hand upon his

heart," to being, "burdened with the black secret of his soul.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850 in the area which was considered a highly religious area of New England. When it was written, many people judged the novel solely on its story telling, whereas ignoring the loads of hidden themes that Hawthorne placed in the novel. "The Scarlet Letter" has many different themes contained in the novel, but the themes of Puritanism vs. Romanticism and the theme of reflection are the most prevalent. The *Scarlet Letter* is chock full of symbolism. Hawthorne uses people and objects and makes them symbolic of events and thoughts. Throughout the course of the book, Hawthorne uses Hester, Arthur Dimmesdale and **Roger Chillingworth** to signify and contrast both the Puritanical and Romantic philosophies ---- Richards characterizes the Romantic conception of life as marked by a view of nature as organic and dynamic, by an aesthetic appreciation of nature, by the inclusion of a moral component in the understanding of nature, by finding in the study of nature a resource for personal development, and, finally, by a distinctive Romantic personality that fused intellectual Endeavour with emotional and imaginative impulses (Richards, 2002) ----. Hester Prynne, as seen by

Puritanism is an extreme sinner; she has gone against the Puritan way of life, committing adultery since it is included in the seven deadly sins. Listed in the same order used by both [Pope Gregory the Great](#) in the 6th century, and later by [Dante Alighieri](#) in his epic poem [The Divine Comedy](#), the seven deadly sins are as follows: **luxuria** (extravagance, later [lust](#)), **gula** ([gluttony](#)), **avaritia** ([greed](#)), **acedia** ([sloth](#)), **ira** ([wrath](#)), **invidia** ([envy](#)), and **superbia** ([pride](#)). Each of the seven deadly sins has an opposite among the corresponding [seven holy virtues](#) (sometimes also referred to as the **contrary virtues**). In parallel order to the sins they oppose, the seven holy virtues are [chastity](#), [temperance](#), [charity](#), [diligence](#), [patience](#), [kindness](#), and [humility](#) (www.wikipedia.org) ----. For this harsh sin, she must wear a symbol of shame for the rest of her life. However, the Romantic philosophies of Hawthorne contrast the Puritanical beliefs. The Romantics liberates the free play of the emotions and creativity ----. In this case, the free play of the emotions is poured into Hester Prynne's forbidden love to Dimmesdale, but, Hester is illustrated to be successful in freeing her instinct and emotions in the name of love she feels. Here, she is characterized as a beautiful, young woman who has sinned, but forgiven in the eyes of most.

G. Puritanism, Romanticism, and Reason As Reflected in Three Main Characters of 'The Scarlet Letter'

The novel is again about the struggle of three people to find happiness in a Puritan society. The three main characters - Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth – were engaged in a triangle relationship that Hester married Chillingworth without any basis of love but was eventually attracted by a town's priest, Arthur Dimmesdale, and this act of adultery – since it was done beyond the wedlock - produced a baby girl named Pearl; though, only Hester knew that Dimmesdale is the father. She had promised Dimmesdale not to reveal his identity. However, when public finally prevailed the result of their committing adultery, Hester was the one the blame was put on. She had to wear a letter 'A' standing for 'Adultery' to wherever she went.

Philosophy is the study of the nature of existence, knowledge, truth, beauty, justice, validity, mind, and language (www.wikipedia.com). This paper presents each character in the novel that represents one or more philosophies including **Puritanism, Romanticism, Reason** and that one could adhere to in life:

- Romanticism focuses on the individual and preaches finding truth.
- Reason involves the belief that one can use logic to solve anything and a perfect society will create perfect men.
- Puritanism is where all that matters to anyone is God.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne uses Hester Prynne's uncontrolled adherence to several philosophies, Roger Chillingworth's strict adherence to logic and reason, and Arthur Dimmesdale's unwavering devotion to Puritanism to prove that true and complete happiness can never be attained by strictly following one philosophy.

1. Hester Prynne

Hester Prynne represents a number of philosophies: Reason, Puritanism, and Romanticism. Early in the novel, after Hester's term of imprisonment is completed, she is free to go anywhere in the world, but she chose to stay in Boston. Her decision to take the time to examine her state of affairs and produce what a logical rationale is for remaining in Boston is proof of Hester's use of logic and reason. While Hester's decision to stay is largely a product of her using Reason,

society's Puritan influence also plays into her decision process. Puritanism has taught her that the most important part of life is her personal relationship with God. Hester deeply believes that because she has sinned, she must remain in Boston and undergo penance for her sin. Hester has always had some Romantic qualities ---- as Hawthorne describes the characteristic of Hester as an "instinct" that impels an individual to return after periods of absence. In addition, he poses about individual identity for each of the characters in *The Scarlet Letter* struggles with questions of identity, both in terms of self- and public perception, but her sin alienates her from society such that she decides to live in a small thatched cottage on the outskirts of town. Hester followed her instincts, fell in love with Dimmesdale, and had Pearl. Now, her alienation forces her to follow her instincts much more. On the outskirts of town, virtually alone, she is free from the influences of the townspeople and is able to make her own decisions without any biased opinions. These qualities act together to make Hester a good and happy person. She never fully makes her way back into society, though, she gradually becomes accepted more and more by the townspeople, and as time goes on, she finds happiness. Even Hester Prynne refuses to reveal the real father of Pearl by saying “*And my child must seek a Heavenly Father, she shall*

never know an earthly one!"(SL, 1990: 74). Ultimately, the happiness Hester finds is achieved only by following more than one philosophy; even though it may not be her planned choosing. Roger Chillingworth, on the other hand, is used by Hawthorne to show the negative consequences that come by following only one philosophy.

Individualism is the [moral](#) stance, [political philosophy](#), or social outlook that stresses [independence](#) and self-reliance. Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires, while opposing most external interference upon one's choices, whether by [society](#), the [state](#), or any other group or institution. Individualism is opposed to [collectivism](#) or [statism](#), which stresses that communal, community, group, societal, or national goals should take priority over individual goals. Individualism is also opposed to [tradition](#), [religion](#), or any other form of external [moral](#) standard being used to limit an individual's choice of actions (www.wikipedia.org).

Individual freedom was clearly a foreign idea to the colony (puritanical setting), for Hawthorne opens the narrative proper with a chapter entitled "The Prison-Door." This door, "studded with iron spikes" (p. 158), asserts the power of the civil authority and its

willingness to use physical force to coerce individuals to conform their behavior and their thinking to the standards of the community. By beginning with this image of enclosure and punishment, Hawthorne emphasizes the oppressive restriction of the world his characters inhabit. Each of the public settings he uses—the jail, the marketplace, and the scaffold—are infused with meaning by the culture that has constructed them, particularly the scaffold, which is seen as an instrument conducive to good citizenship. Against this darkness and gloom, Hawthorne contrasts the wild rosebush that grows alongside the prison door, a thing of beauty that he claims "*has been kept alive in history*" (SL, 1990: 159). Hester Prynne's story unfolds with the opening of the prison door, but her entrance into the narrative is not a step into freedom but a movement initially toward further punishment.

Hester Prynne re-enters the public world from which she has been secluded until after the birth of her child. The marketplace is peopled by various members of the community: government officials, members of the clergy, and local townsfolk, who view Hester as a criminal, and source of scandal, a scandal that affects not only her personally but the community as a whole. In this Puritan culture, marriage is viewed as one of the foundations of

social order, and a crime that violates the bonds of marriage threatens order itself. The demand for punishment of Hester's crimes is evident in the words of some of the female spectators, who feel she has not suffered enough, that the civil authorities "*should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead*" (SL,1990:162). This desire to see Hester physically marked for her crime reflects what the modern French theorist Michel Foucault has identified as the law's need to display its triumph visibly on the body of the transgressor; it also reflects the Puritan distrust of the flesh, which is perceived as a source of temptation. Initially this scene suggests a uniformity of vision among the community, but Sacvan Bercovitch calls attention to the multiple viewpoints actually present in the crowd; he sees this as evidence of "pliancy" within the Puritan community, creating the possibility for evolving views of Hester Prynne and, on a larger scale, an evolving culture that will eventually lead to the successful American Revolution.

When Hester emerges from the prison carrying Pearl, the evidence of Hester's guilt, she cannot escape the charge of adultery. As she climbs to the scaffold, Hester is placed in a position that emphasizes her isolation from those around her. Questioned by the civil and religious authorities, Hester

refuses to name her partner in adultery, even though she recognizes him among the dignitaries before her. In doing so, Hester takes the responsibility for what has happened upon herself, intensifying her isolation and loneliness. By positioning her as he does in this scene, Hawthorne calls attention to Hester's oppositional role against the patriarchal authorities of Puritan church and state. He uses her silence in ironic ways; Hester's culture expects women to keep silent, yet her silence here functions as an act of resistance against an authority she does not accept. As punishment for her choices, Hester faces exile to the edge of the settlement, emphasizing her position as an outcast, but for Hester this marginalization allows her to engage in further resistance to authority as she speculates on the possibilities of freedom and self-realization unhampered by the close scrutiny of neighbors.

The Garden of Eden for eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As a result of their knowledge, Adam and Eve are made aware of their humanness, that which separates them from the divine and from other creatures. Once expelled from the Garden of Eden, they are forced to toil and to procreate—two "labors" that seem to define the human condition. The experience of Hester and Dimmesdale recalls the story of Adam

and Eve because, in both cases, sin results in expulsion and suffering. But it also results in knowledge—specifically, in knowledge of what it means to be human. For Hester, the scarlet letter functions as “her passport into regions where other women dared not tread,” leading her to “speculate” about her society and herself more “boldly” than anyone else in New England. As for Dimmesdale, the “burden” of his sin gives him “sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind, so that his heart vibrate[s] in unison with theirs.” His eloquent and powerful sermons derive from this sense of empathy. Hester and Dimmesdale contemplate their own sinfulness on a daily basis and try to reconcile it with their lived experiences. The Puritan elders, on the other hand, insist on seeing earthly experience as merely an obstacle on the path to heaven. Thus, they view sin as a threat to the community that should be punished and suppressed. Their answer to Hester's sin is to ostracize her. Yet, Puritan society is stagnant, while Hester and Dimmesdale's experience shows that a state of sinfulness can lead to personal growth, sympathy, and understanding of others. Paradoxically, these qualities are shown to be incompatible with a state of purity.

Sin and knowledge are linked in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Bible

begins with the story of Adam and Eve, who were expelled from the Garden of Eden for eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As a result of their knowledge, Adam and Eve are made aware of their humanness, that which separates them from the divine and from other creatures. Once expelled from the Garden of Eden, they are forced to toil and to procreate—two “labors” that seem to define the human condition. The experience of Hester and Dimmesdale recalls the story of Adam and Eve because, in both cases, sin results in expulsion and suffering. Hester leaves the town as a symbol of a divine place for divine people to the forest when she can pay off her sin. For Hester, the scarlet letter functions as “*her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, despair, solitude! These had been her teachers – stern and wild one – and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss*” (SL, 1990: 190). Leading her to “speculate” about her society and herself more “boldly” than anyone else in New England. The Puritan elders, on the other hand, insist on seeing earthly experience as merely an obstacle on the path to heaven. Thus, they view sin as a threat to the community that should be punished and suppressed. Their answer to Hester's sin is to ostracize her. Yet, Puritan society is stagnant, while Hester's experience shows that a state of sinfulness can lead to personal

growth, sympathy, and understanding of others. Paradoxically, these qualities are shown to be incompatible with a state of purity.

2. Roger Chillingworth

Roger Chillingworth represents Reason. His entire life has been based on gaining knowledge and using logic and reason to solve any problem. Chillingworth follows this philosophy in hopes that it will eventually lead him to Dimmesdale. In chapter four of the novel, Chillingworth meets with Hester while she is still in jail. The two sit and talk intimately as Chillingworth tries to discover the name of Pearl's father. Chillingworth begins by saying that he places no blame on Hester. He just wants to know the man who has offended him, and he vows not to reveal her lover's identity to the public, nor cause him any bodily harm. Hester refuses and Chillingworth becomes much more forceful.

Again, Hester refuses. Chillingworth then unfurls his plan for discovering Dimmesdale and getting his revenge. He will use his knowledge of medicine and simple remedies to pose as a doctor and live in the town until he discovers the man whom he seeks. "He bears no letter of infamy wrought into his garment, as thou dost; but I shall read it on his heart." Once Chillingworth finds him, he will watch as the man is crushed

beneath the burden of guilt he has laid upon himself. This passage reveals what Chillingworth has been and what he will become.

After several years, Chillingworth's adherence to logic and reason lead him to Dimmesdale where he takes great joy in mentally tormenting him. Chillingworth often raises discussions of sin and guilt, to both confirm and bother the reverend. These discussions make Dimmesdale very uncomfortable. In chapter ten, the doctor asks the reverend why people do not confess their sins openly. He responds, "**They mostly do.**" Chillingworth then urges harder and asks why one would not confess his sin. Dimmesdale becomes a bit uncomfortable and attempts to justify the actions of a sinner to soothe his own guilty conscience. This burden of guilt ultimately leads to Dimmesdale's demise. Once Dimmesdale dies, Chillingworth withers away and dies within one year. "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 sight, like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun." Chillingworth's happiness was only temporary because he had made the mistake of focusing his skills on one problem - finding and

tormenting the reverend. Eventually, this debilitates him and he can only focus on that one problem. Then, Dimmesdale dies and Chillingworth himself becomes weaker and weaker until, finally, he dies. Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, however, suffers more dearly than anyone as a result of sticking to only one philosophy.

3. Arthur Dimmesdale

Dimmesdale is an intransigent Puritan and nothing can make him change - not even death. Arthur Dimmesdale, the local reverend and Hester's lover, made Hester swear that she would not tell anyone that he is the father of her child. The reverend, being the embodiment of Puritanism, follows more closely than anyone the philosophy that his relationship with God matters as a town reverend, he is obliged to be a perfect example in community that worshipping and glorifying God without committing sinful deeds are a must for him --- more than anything else and that he must only answer to God. Hawthorne uses Dimmesdale as a symbol of Puritanism. He picks out and exaggerates the flaws in Puritanism and makes them Dimmesdale's characteristics. Dimmesdale feels that God will punish him for his sin and that he needs only answer to God for his sin, so he keeps it a secret. Dimmesdale tries to go about life as if nothing has

changed, but his guilt weakens him and thrusts him into a downward spiral of misery, ending in death. His guilt eats at him and he is often seen clutching at his heart, as if it pains him. Whenever the topic of sin or Hester was brought up, Dimmesdale would clutch at his chest. His guilt is like a knife being thrust into his heart. In an attempt to free himself of his guilt, Dimmesdale resorts to physically harming himself. "In Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, under lock and key, there was a bloody scourge." He would also starve himself, "until his knees trembled beneath him, as an act of penance." Dimmesdale's guilt weakens him to the point that the townspeople fear he may soon die, and as a physician, Chillingworth, agrees to stay with Dimmesdale at his house to care for him. All the while, Chillingworth, while pretending to care for Dimmesdale, is mentally tormenting him, adding to Dimmesdale's burden of guilt. At one point in his tormented life, while in the woods, Dimmesdale reveals his true feelings to Hester. "Hester, I am most miserable!" [Dimmesdale]" Dimmesdale resents Hester for her ability to "wear the scarlet letter (a symbol of her sin) openly" while he suffers with his overwhelming guilt. Dimmesdale is rapidly nearing the end. Only when Dimmesdale knows he is doomed does he acknowledge and confess his sin. He

travels to the same place where Hester was put on display and reveals his sin to the public. Immediately, Dimmesdale sinks to the ground, says "farewell," and dies. Dimmesdale stayed true to his beliefs, and, as a result, found nothing but unhappiness. Dimmesdale would not allow himself to stray and for nearly eight years he wallowed in misery and pain, achieving nothing.

Hester, Chillingworth, and Dimmesdale struggle throughout the novel to find happiness while staying within their beliefs. Hester ultimately finds happiness by venturing beyond the confines of pure Puritanism though it is her Puritan faith that causes her life to stay in Boston and wear the scarlet letter. Chillingworth is unable to stray from his strict adherence to logic and reason. He is doomed by needing to know who has committed the sinful act of adultery with his wife. His logic and reason guide him to his answer but his drive to know eventually weakens and kills him. Reverend Dimmesdale strayed from his Puritan beliefs when he committed adultery. His struggle is not with Reason or Romanticism but with his steadfast adherence to the Puritan beliefs. Dimmesdale does not find reason within himself for his relationship with Hester nor does he reveal the truth about his sinful

relationship until he realizes he is dying.

Nevertheless, the last effort to clear his conscience results in his death. True happiness escapes all three characters except one and that is Hester. Hester blended the philosophies of Puritanism, Romanticism and Reason was able to live life comfortably. Philosophies, a person cannot have just one.

H. Conclusion

The Scarlet Letter is a monumental masterpiece which represents a portrait of puritan period in New England – new life in America. The puritan illustrated in this novel represented by Arthur Dimmesdale does give tangible evidence to the readers about self-conflicts within a religion figure's conscience that brings about two opposite wills – to admit publicly with a risk of destroying society trust toward church power and divine or to keep the secret by letting someone he loves be tortured, tormented, as humiliated.

Three main characters of *The Scarlet Letter* pose different philosophies as the allegorical meanings suggest. Puritanism, Romanticism, and Reason were central issues adhered to those three characters as symbols of conflicts between Puritanism and Romanticism.

Committing a sin – in this case adultery – must be paid with society condemn. However, behind the sin two main characters have committed, there comes happiness when a person does not only hold one single philosophy in his/her life as proposed by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*.

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