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## Punishment As The Consequence Of One's Sin The The Scarlet Letter

"Men are punished by their sins, not for them." - Elbert Hubbard[HK]. Punishment is always caused by one's sins whether that be public disgrace or being punished by their own conscience [BRG]. In Hawthorne's classic, The Scarlet Letter, several characters receive punishment, both just and unjust, for their sins [TH]. Hester receives punishment both publicly and privately, Dimmesdale receives punishment by keeping his sin private, and Chillingworth receives punishment by seeking revenge for Dimmesdale's sin against him [OS].

Hester receives public and private along with just and unjust punishment by her sin of adultery [TS1]. At the beginning of the story, we see Hester being brought out of jail for her public punishment[CE1]. 'Open a passage; and I promise ye, Mistress Prynne shall be set where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight of her brave apparel from this time till an hour past meridian. A blessing on the righteous colony of the Massachusetts, where iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine! Come along, Madame Hester, and show your scarlet letter in the market-place!' (pg.3-4) [E1]. Hester is receiving punishment for her crime; however, it seems unjust due to the fact that she is being punished alone. This is the sin of two, but only one is being punished[R1]. Hester has become an outcast in her society. Her sin has set her apart. [CE2]. "As an outcast: Standing alone in the world--alone, as to any dependence on society, and with little Pearl to be guided and protected--alone, and hopeless of retrieving her position, even had she not scorned to consider it desirable--she cast away the fragment a broken chain." (pg.49)

[E2]. She is unjustly cast out of society; this leaves her alone with no help to raise Pearl. The punishment she is receiving in this portion of the story is unjust because her sin is now affecting her child who didn't sin along with her [R2]. At the governor's house, Pearl is about to be taken away from Hester. Hester shows love to Pearl, but also exclaims that by Pearl, she is constantly punished[CE3]. "She is my happiness--she is my torture, none the less! Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me, too! See ye not, she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a millionfold the power of retribution for my sin? Ye shall not take her! I will die first!(pg.27) [E3]. Hester is justly punished by her sin. This punishment a direct consequence for her actions [R3]. Hester received both just and unjust punishment by her sin, while Dimmesdale only received just punishment for his [TR1].

Dimmesdale receives only just, private punishment by his sin of adultery in The Scarlet Letter [TS2]. Hester is telling Dimmesdale that her punishment is worse because she has lost her good reputation, but Dimmesdale claims his is worse [CE4]. "Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret! Thou little knowest what a relief it is, after the torment of a seven years' cheat, to look into an eye that recognises me for what I am!" (pg.61-62) [E4]. Dimmesdale's punishment is fit for him. He should have a guilty conscience because he has not confessed his sin. He can't have peace because he is hiding a sin; he is being justly punished by his sin [R4]. Dimmesdale's guilt has taken form as physical illness [CE5]. "He looked now more careworn and emaciated than as we described him at the scene of Hester's public ignominy; and whether it were his failing health, or whatever the cause might be, his large dark eyes had a world of pain in their troubled and melancholy depth." (pg.28)

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[E5]. He is ill because he has the stress of his unconfessed sin on his heart. This is just punishment because he should confess his sin. This is his body's natural reaction to guilt [R5]. Chillingworth has befriended Dimmesdale to try to get him to confess for his revenge. He nags Dimmesdale constantly to try to wear him down and get him to confess [CE6]. 'Thus, a sickness,' continued Roger Chillingworth, going on, in an unaltered tone, without heeding the interruption, but standing up and confronting the emaciated and white-cheeked minister, with his low, dark, and misshapen figure,--'a sickness, a sore place, if we may so call it, in your spirit hath immediately its appropriate manifestation in your bodily frame. Would you, therefore, that your physician heal the bodily evil? How may this be unless you first lay open to him the wound or trouble in your soul?' (pg.37) [E6]. Chillingworth knows Dimmesdale's secret, but Dimmesdale is still punished privately. By Chillingworth nagging Dimmesdale, Dimmesdale is incapable at putting his conscience at rest. This is a just punishment because he needs to confess his sin [R6]. Though Dimmesdale should have confessed, it was not right of Chillingworth to seek revenge towards Dimmesdale [TR2].

Chillingworth's sin of seeking revenge in *The Scarlet Letter*, received just punishment [TS3]. Chillingworth has begun befriending Dimmesdale so that he may seek revenge. He has committed his life to seeking revenge [CE7]. "more wretched than his victim--the avenger had devoted himself." (pg.39)[E7]. Chillingworth is receiving just punishment by his sin because he is choosing to give up his life; he is committing his life to this sin[R7]. Dimmesdale confesses before Chillingworth can tell the crowd of Dimmesdale's sin [CE8]. "Old Roger Chillingworth knelt down beside him, with a blank, dull countenance, out of which the life seemed to have departed,

'Thou hast escaped me!' he repeated more than once. 'Thou hast escaped me!'

'May God forgive thee!' said the minister. 'Thou, too, hast deeply sinned!'(pg.88) [E8]. Chillingworth is punished because he can no longer get his revenge that he had committed his life to. His punishment is just because he was trying to get Dimmesdale to confess for the wrong reasons [R8]. After Dimmesdale dies, Chillingworth has no energy left from the energy he received while trying to seek revenge. He ends up dying because he has no purpose left. [CE9]. "All his strength and energy--all his vital and intellectual force--seemed at once to desert him, insomuch that he positively withered up, shrivelled away and almost vanished from mortal sight, like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun. This unhappy man had made the very principle of his life to consist in the pursuit and systematic exercise revenge; and when, by its completist triumph consummation that evil principle was left with no further material to support it--when, in short, there was no more Devil's work on earth for him to do, it only remained for the unhumanised mortal to betake himself whither his master would find him tasks enough, and pay him his wages duly." (pg. 90)

"At old Roger Chillingworth's decease, (which took place within the year)" (pg.90) [E9]. Chillingworth is receiving just punishment because he contributed to the guilt that killed Dimmesdale. [R9]. Chillingworth along with Hester and Dimmesdale sinned; however, they did not receive equal punishment by their sin [TR3].

Hester received unjust public punishment, but just private punishment. Dimmesdale's private punishment was just because he needed to confess his sin. Chillingworth's punishment was just because he gave his life away to sin and ended up paying for it at the end of his life [SYN]. All three of these characters in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* were punished by their sins

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[RBRG]. People are truly punished by their sins, not for their sins. Sin first punishes the conscience, then comes public punishment. A guilty conscience is a just punishment [RHK].

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