Sins In The Scarlet Letter Essay, Research Paper

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. Roger Chillingworth committed the greatest sin in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter because he let himself be ruled by hatred and the consuming desire for vengeance. This becomes visible through examination of the other sins present in the novel and the comparison of them in relation to Chillingworth. In essence, there were three main sins committed in The Scarlet Letter: The sins of Hester, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth.

Unknowingly, Hester Prynne sailed from Europe to the Americas betrayed and tricked. Waiting for the arrival of her husband, Roger Chillingworth, she lost hope in him ever arriving or even still being alive. After enduring two years of tortured loneliness and lost love, Hester wished to feel the warmth of love again. She tried to fill this emptiness by making love with the Reverend Dimmesdale. When her child Pearl was born, Hester’s adulterous sin was discovered and she was cast out from their society and required to wear an embroidered A on her bosom in punishment. Hester felt guilt for her sin the rest of her life and sought repentance and absolution until the time she died. Hester never had true love for Chillingworth, but was tricked into marriage. She later told him this while speaking in her jail cell saying to him, … thou knowest that I was frank with thee, I felt no love, nor feigned any. Hester was betrayed, tricked and allowed herself to become caught up in the evil desires of another. She then allowed herself to be trapped by sin, causing great remorse in her life; making her sin the lesser of the three committed in The Scarlet Letter. (Pg.53)

Reverend Dimmesdale was a renowned, prideful man stricken with sin and extreme guilt. From the time Hester and Dimmesdale made love, he was grievous of his sin but he also felt a great love towards her. Dimmesdale’s stubborn pride troubled him greatly, and although he tried many times, he could not confess his sin to his religious followers. Dimmesdale felt guilt so strongly that he scourged himself on his breast and patterned an A into his own flesh, yet he could not confess his sin until his grief grew so great it caused him to perish. Reverend Dimmesdale’s sin was greater than Hester’s because he let his pride conflict with his repentance, and let his life be ruined by his anguish.

Physically deformed and mysterious, Roger Chillingworth finally met his wife after being separated from her for almost two years. He showed no great anger towards her and took upon himself some of the accountability saying it was …my folly and thy weakness, (Pg.52) which was the cause of Hester’s sin. Chillingworth’s only feeling was one of revenge towards the man who had been Hester’s lover. Chillingworth was obsessed by hate and revenge so much that when Dimmesdale died … the life seemed to have departed… (Pg.72) from him and he died within a year of Dimmesdale’s death. Chillingworth never felt guilt or attempted repentance because he … violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart. (Pg.133) He sought to destroy Dimmesdale’s mind, and neither Hester nor Dimmesdale ever sought any kind of revenge against Chillingworth. The sin committed by Roger Chillingworth was greater than Hester’s and Dimmesdale’s because his life was a continuous sin. Also, he never regretted his actions, which both of the others did. Throughout the book, Roger Chillingworth sought to demean and destroy the life of another. He never felt forgiveness towards Dimmesdale or ever sought repentance for his own sins. Chillingworth’s life revolved around vengeance towards Dimmesdale, so when Dimmesdale died he no longer had a reason to live. He died within that same year as a result of this. Roger Chillingworth’s sin was the greatest committed because it ruled his life even until his death.

Keeping the comparisons between the sins of Hester Prynne, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth in mind, the reader can easily establish that Roger Chillingworth committed the greatest sin in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter. He did this by being ruled by hatred and the feeling of vengeance.