

### Roger Chillingworth Analysis

In *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, many of the characters have shown hidden sides, but none have shown as much as Roger Chillingworth. Unlike other characters, Roger's development is somewhat linear. He transforms from the scholarly old man to a man obsessed with a task. Throughout his time in Boston we see only one thing: his obsession with vengeance. Through the author's practice of foreboding figurative language, dark syntax, and harsh diction one thing has become evident: Roger's characterization is symbolic of the devil.

Starting with the first appearance of Roger, something is clearly wrong. During his first appearance, he is described as "a white man, clad in a strange disarray of civilized and savage costume." (Hawthorne, 56) However, even when he is better dressed, he is far from being attractive. He is described as slightly deformed, with one shoulder being higher than the other, as well as both tall and thin. The author also makes a point of how Chillingworth "could hardly be termed aged" (Hawthorne, 56), but also appeared "well stricken in years." His eyes are then described as having a "strange, penetrating power" (Hawthorne, 55). These physical attributes are all directed towards Roger serving as the symbol of the devil in this town. Next on my list is the fact that Roger is not a puritan like many others were during the time period. This is proven by the fact that during the time period, many puritans looked down on, and sought to convert the Indians, but when Roger was held captive by them for "upward of a year" (Hawthorne, 67), he did not judge them as heathens. Instead, he learns the herbs and medicines used by the natives, and uses those to help him with keeping his later victim,

Reverend Dimmesdale, alive. The puritans of the time also heavily believed in providence, or the hand of God, being involved in every event. "Individuals of wiser faith, indeed, who knew that Heaven promotes its purposes without aiming at the stage-effect of what is called miraculous interposition, were inclined to see a providential hand in Roger Chillingworth's opportune arrival." (Hawthorne, 110) In this quote, the townspeople ironically assume when Roger shows up that his arrival and help of Dimmesdale come from God, while actually being rooted in something much darker. As Roger continues to go mad, the "Man of science" created by Hawthorne starts to really come out. Roger plays this game without concern for feelings, and this coolness is actually reflected in his name, Chillingworth. Due to his lack of regard for effects on others, Roger takes on the mindset of a scientist, pursuing Hester's lover with the techniques and motives of one. He even goes so far as to move in with Dimmesdale, just to keep an eye on him while still conducting tests. Roger believes that corruption of the body leads to corruption of the soul: "Wherever there is a heart and an intellect, the diseases of the physical frame are tinged with the peculiarities of these" (Hawthorne, 113). In chapter 9, aptly named "The Leech", Roger's motives are explored by the author and show his true obsession with ruining the life of Reverend Dimmesdale. The case for Roger Chillingworth being symbolic of the devil is strong for these reasons. His ugliness is representative of his ugliness on the inside as well. The fact that he isn't puritan opens up many possibilities as to where he learned and gained his skills. Finally, the fact that his motives are so extremely convoluted and focused on only one goal for over 7 years means something has to be wrong.