ENG II Honors

**Examining the Effects of Repression on Physical and Emotional Health of Characters**

*Now that you’ve done some general research on the psychological phenomenon of “repression,” you’re ready to begin analyzing this phenomenon in the characters of* The Scarlet Letter. *Reread the following passages that trace the changes in the physical appearance and mental and emotional health of Roger Chillingworth and Arthur Dimmesdale. Then, discuss the questions that follow.*

**CHILLINGWORTH**

**Chapter 3**

He was small in stature, with a furrowed visage, which as yet could hardly be termed aged. There was a remarkable intelligence in his features, as of a person who had so cultivated his mental part that it could not fail to mould the physical to itself and become manifest by unmistakable tokens. Although, by a seemingly careless arrangement of his heterogeneous garb, he had endeavoured to conceal or abate the peculiarity, it was sufficiently evident to Hester Prynne that one of this man’s shoulders rose higher than the other.

**Chapter 9**

A large number—and many of these were persons of such sober sense and practical observation that their opinions would have been valuable in other matters—affirmed that Roger Chillingworth’s aspect had undergone a remarkable change while he had dwelt in town, and especially since his abode with Mr. Dimmesdale. At first, his expression had been calm, meditative, scholar-like. Now there was something ugly and evil in his face, which they had not previously noticed, and which grew still the more obvious to sight the oftener they looked upon him.

**Chapter 10**

Old Roger Chillingworth, throughout life, had been calm in temperament, kindly, though not of warm affections, but ever, and in all his relations with the world, a pure and upright man. He had begun an investigation, as he imagined, with the severe and equal integrity of a judge, desirous only of truth, even as if the question involved no more than the air-drawn lines and figures of a geometrical problem, instead of human passions, and wrongs inflicted on himself. But, as he proceeded, a terrible fascination, a kind of fierce, though still calm, necessity, seized the old man within its gripe, and never set him free again until he had done all its bidding.

**Chapter 14**

All this while Hester had been looking steadily at the old man, and was shocked, as well as wondersmitten, to discern what a change had been wrought upon him within the past seven years. It was not so much that he had grown older; for though the traces of advancing life were visible he bore his age well, and seemed to retain a wiry vigour and alertness. But the former aspect of an intellectual and studious man, calm and quiet, which was what she best remembered in him, had altogether vanished, and been succeeded by an eager, searching, almost fierce, yet carefully guarded look. It seemed to be his wish and purpose to mask this expression with a smile, but the latter played him false, and flickered over his visage so derisively that the spectator could see his blackness all the better for it. Ever and anon, too, there came a glare of red light out of his eyes, as if the old man’s soul were on fire and kept on smouldering duskily within his breast, until by some casual puff of passion it was blown into a momentary flame. This he repressed as speedily as possible, and strove to look as if nothing of the kind had happened. In a word, old Roger Chillingworth was a striking evidence of man’s faculty of transforming himself into a devil, if he will only, for a reasonable space of time, undertake a devil’s office. This unhappy person had effected such a transformation by devoting himself for seven years to the constant analysis of a heart full of torture, and deriving his enjoyment thence, and adding fuel to those fiery tortures which he

analysed and gloated over.

**Chapter 15**

So Roger Chillingworth—a deformed old figure with a face that haunted men’s memories longer than they liked—took leave of Hester Prynne, and went stooping away along the earth. He gathered here and there a herb, or grubbed up a root and put it into the basket on his arm. His gray beard almost touched the ground as he crept onward.

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**DIMMESDALE**

**Chapter 3**

The directness of this appeal drew the eyes of the whole crowd upon the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale—

young clergyman, who had come from one of the great English universities, bringing all the learning of the age into our wild forest land. His eloquence and religious fervour had already given the earnest

of high eminence in his profession. He was a person of very striking aspect, with a white, lofty, and

impending brow; large, brown, melancholy eyes, and a mouth which, unless when he forcibly compressed it, was apt to be tremulous, expressing both nervous sensibility and a vast power of self restraint. Notwithstanding his high native gifts and scholar-like attainments, there was an air about this young minister—an apprehensive, a startled, a half-frightened look—as of a being who felt himself quite astray, and at a loss in the pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own. Therefore, so far as his duties would permit, he trod in the shadowy by-paths, and thus kept himself

simple and childlike, coming forth, when occasion was, with a freshness, and fragrance, and dewy purity

of thought, which, as many people said, affected them like the speech of an angel.

**Chapter 8**

…the young minister at once came forward, pale, and holding his hand over his heart, as was his

custom whenever his peculiarly nervous temperament was thrown into agitation. 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.

**Chapter 9**

…with every successive Sabbath, his cheek was paler and thinner, and his voice more tremulous

than before—when it had now become a constant habit, rather than a casual gesture, to press his hand

over his heart?

**Chapter 12**

The minister felt for the child’s other hand, and took it. The moment that he did so, there came what

seemed a tumultuous rush of new life, other life than his own pouring like a torrent into his heart, and

hurrying through all his veins, as if the mother and the child were communicating their vital warmth to

his half-torpid system. The three formed an electric chain.

**Chapter 13**

In her late singular interview with Mr. Dimmesdale, Hester Prynne was shocked at the condition to

which she found the clergyman reduced. His nerve seemed absolutely destroyed. His moral force was

abased into more than childish weakness. It grovelled helpless on the ground, even while his intellectual

faculties retained their pristine strength, or had perhaps acquired a morbid energy, which disease only

could have given them.

**QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS**

1. From a psychological standpoint, what would ugliness or ill health represent?
2. On this psychological level, what accounts for Chillingworth’s deteriorating physical appearance

from a middle-aged, mildly-deformed man at the beginning of the book to the gnarled dwarf-like

thing he is becoming toward the end?

1. Similarly, what accounts for Dimmesdale’s physical and emotional deterioration?
2. What could account for Dimmesdale’s apparent, though temporary, improvement in chapters 12 (and 22 if you’ve read it)?
3. Why doesn’t Hester exhibit a similar physical or emotional deterioration?