

## **The Scarlet Letter-Nathaniel Hawthorne**

The Scarlet Letter, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, is a classic novel set in the Puritanical society of Boston, Massachusetts, during the 17th century. The Scarlet Letter opens with a prelude where an unnamed narrator, working at the Salem Custom House, discovers a manuscript and a beautiful scarlet letter "A" in the attic. After losing his job, he decides to develop the story from the manuscript into a novel.

The story of The Scarlet Letter revolves around four central characters. Hester Prynne, the strong-willed protagonist, grapples with the societal impacts of her choices. Arthur Dimmesdale, Hester's lover and Pearl's father, struggles with guilt and hypocrisy. Roger Chillingworth, Hester's estranged husband, embodies vengeance with his intellectual cunning. Finally, Pearl, the child born from the sin of Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne, serves as a constant reminder of their transgression.

The story begins with Hester Prynne, who gives birth to a daughter, out of wedlock. As punishment for her sin, Hester is publicly shamed and forced to wear the scarlet letter 'A' on her chest to signify her adultery. Despite being compelled by the community to reveal the father's identity, Hester refuses to name him.

Hester sees her long-lost husband, Roger Chillingworth, among the spectators, who has come back disguised as someone else. He vows to seek revenge on the man who dishonoured him, unaware that it is Arthur Dimmesdale. After Hester's release, she settles in a cottage on the outskirts of town with her daughter, Pearl. Pearl's fascination with the scarlet letter troubles Hester, and the pair face isolation and contempt from the community.

Chillingworth becomes Dimmesdale's physician and suspects the minister of secret guilt. He exerts psychological pressure, causing Dimmesdale's deteriorating health to worsen. Dimmesdale is consumed by guilt but lacks the courage to confess his sin publicly. He even starves and whips himself as a punishment.

Hester decides to help Dimmesdale. In the forest, Hester meets Dimmesdale and informs him of Chillingworth's true identity. She tries to persuade Chillingworth to stop tormenting him. Chillingworth acknowledges his cruel and wicked nature, but claims he is protecting Dimmesdale by not disclosing his secret to the public. She persuades Dimmesdale to leave with her and Pearl to Europe, and they arrange to board a ship the day after Dimmesdale is scheduled to give an important sermon. Dimmesdale delivers the sermon. However, he realizes that he is dying and won't be able to make it to Europe. He mounts the scaffold and asks Hester and Pearl to join him. Tormented by his conscience, Dimmesdale finally confesses his sin on the scaffold, and dies shortly afterward in Hester's arms. Chillingworth, dies soon after, leaving Pearl, a substantial inheritance.

Years later, Hester returns alone to Boston, wearing the scarlet letter once more until her death. She is buried near Dimmesdale, their shared grave marked with a simple epitaph: "On a field, sable, the letter A, gules."

The Scarlet Letter is indeed often viewed as a quintessential Puritan novel due to its setting, themes, and exploration of Puritanical beliefs and

values. The austere and rigid society of the Puritans is vividly depicted, highlighted by their strict moral code, harsh judgments, and emphasis on religious piety. The novel explores themes of sin, guilt, redemption, and the hypocrisy of society. The characters are confronted with the consequences of their actions as the story develops and secrets are revealed. The Scarlet Letter is a powerful study about human nature and the complexities of morality, making it one of Hawthorne's most enduring works.

Dept of English(Aided)