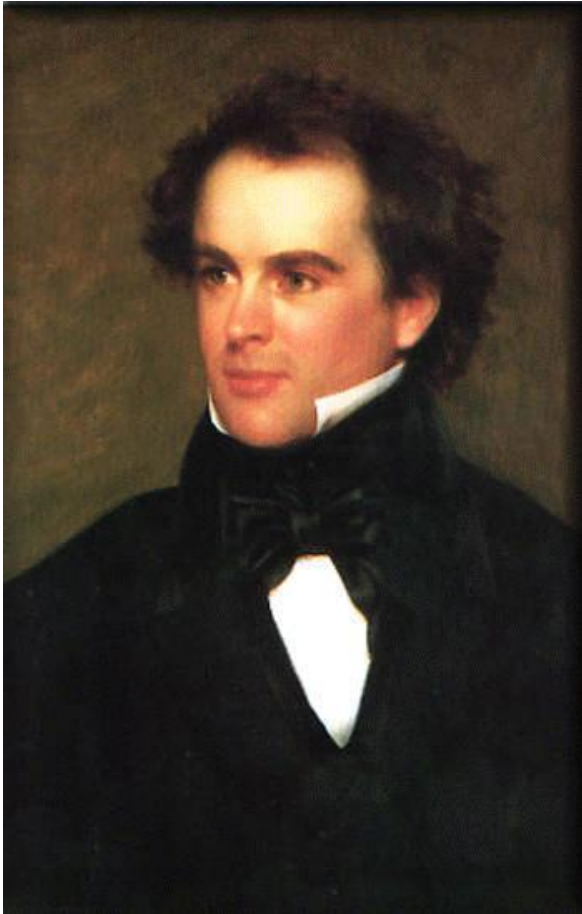
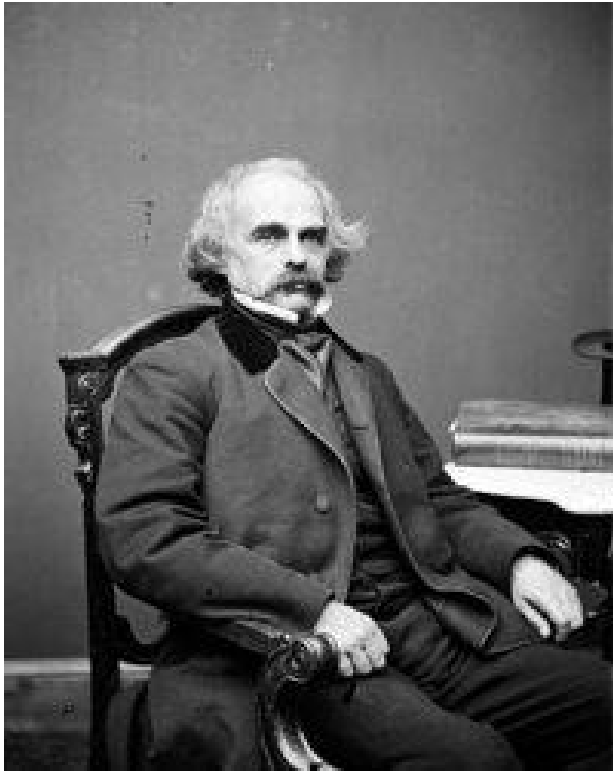


# Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Scarlet Letter*



— a 19th century American novelist and short story writer.

—a key figure in the development of American literature for his tales of the nation's colonial history.



(July 4, 1804 - May 19, 1864)



There is evil in every human heart, which may remain latent, through the whole life; but circumstances may rouse it to activity.

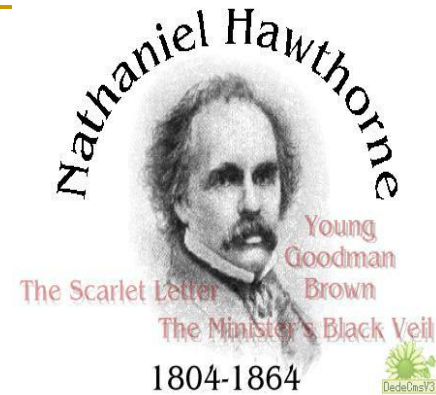
—Nathaniel Hawthorne

# Contents



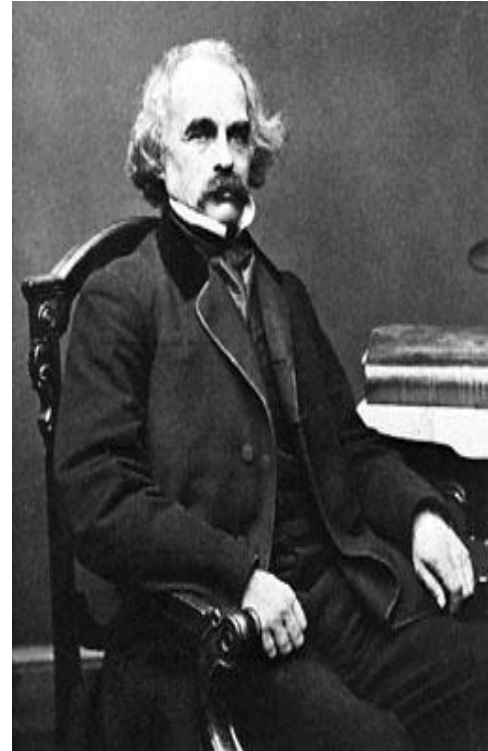
- I. Hawthorne's Life and Major Works
- II. Hawthorne's Sense of Evil and Sin
- III. Hawthorne's Characters
- IV. Hawthorne's Aesthetics
- V. *The Scarlet Letter*
- VI. Hawthorne's Style and Contribution

## I. His Life



- 1) He was born on July 4, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts in a prestigious New England family closely related with Puritan church; his ancestors attended the persecution of people belonging to different churches, such as Quakers.
- 2) When he was born, his family declined. He was aware of his ancestors' misdeeds and thus "blackness of Hawthorne" formed. He thought that the reason of his family's decline is his ancestors' misdeeds. And he didn't agree to the optimism held by Transcendentalists about human nature. He wrote lots of works on everlasting evil in human nature.

- 3) He graduated from Bowdoin College. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Mr. Pierce, the 14th American president were his classmates.
- 4) After graduation, he lived in seclusion and wrote.
- 5) Later, he worked as a customs officer.
- 6) After Pierce became president, he was appointed the consul in Liverpool and Italy.

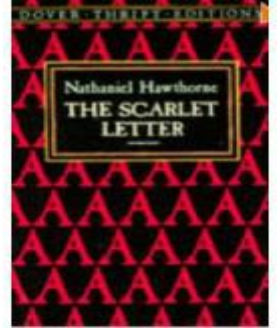


# Major Works

- *Twice-Told Tales*  
《故事新编/重述》
- *The Minister's Black Veil*  
《牧师的黑面纱》
- *Mosses from an Old Manse*  
《古屋青苔》
- *Young Goodman Brown*  
《好小伙子布朗》
- *The Scarlet Letter*  
《红字》
- *The House of Seven Gables*  
《有七个尖角阁的房子》
- *The Blithedale Romance*  
《福谷传奇》
- *The Marble Faun*  
《玉石雕像》

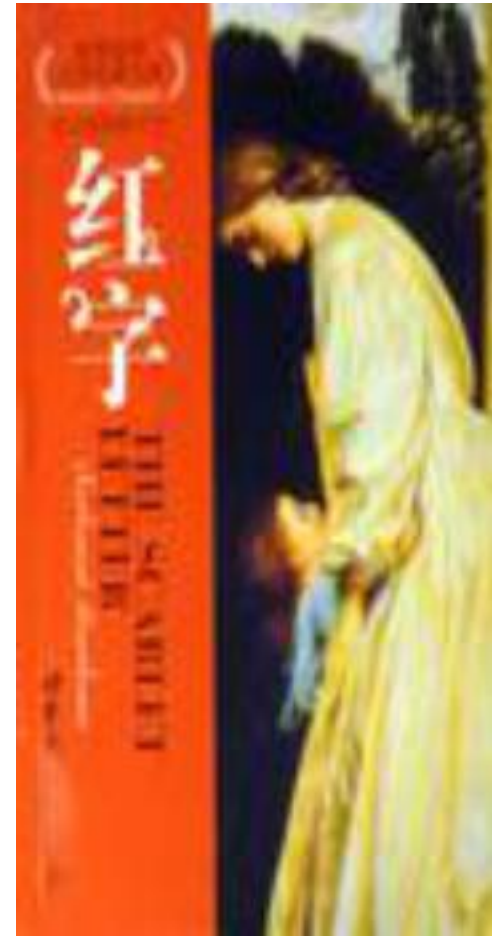


## II. Hawthorne's Sense of Evil and Sin



- He was absorbed by the enigmas of evil and of moral responsibility, interwoven with man's destiny in nature and in eternity.
- Hawthorne concerns about Puritanism, actually one of the basic elements, **that's the thing evil and sin came from**. In the American moral value, Puritans advocated to simplify, to purify. If any person violated the puritan value, he would be judged as sinful. Through the introduction to Hawthorne's life, he was deeply interwoven man's destiny in nature. He lived in such a family background. He was deeply concerned / interwoven evil, nature and eternity. This kind of evil or sin reflected in all his works.

- 1. Most of his works deal with evil one way or another. Evil exists in the human heart. Through all symbols of tradition and the past have been burned in the bonfire of the life of the New World, the source of evil—the human to be man's birthmark.
- 2. Because sin or evil can be passed from generation to generation, so sin will get punished one way or another.
- 3. One source of evil in Hawthorne is overweening intellect. The tension between the head (intellect) and the heart (warmth and feeling.) constitutes one of the elements which make writings enchanting.



### III. Hawthorne's Characters

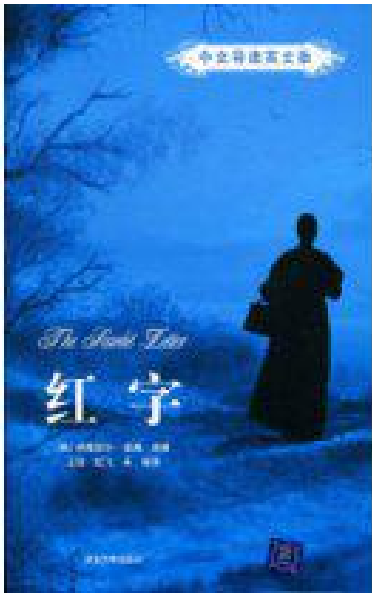


NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE  
*Rappaccini's Daughter*  
Foreword by Simon Schama



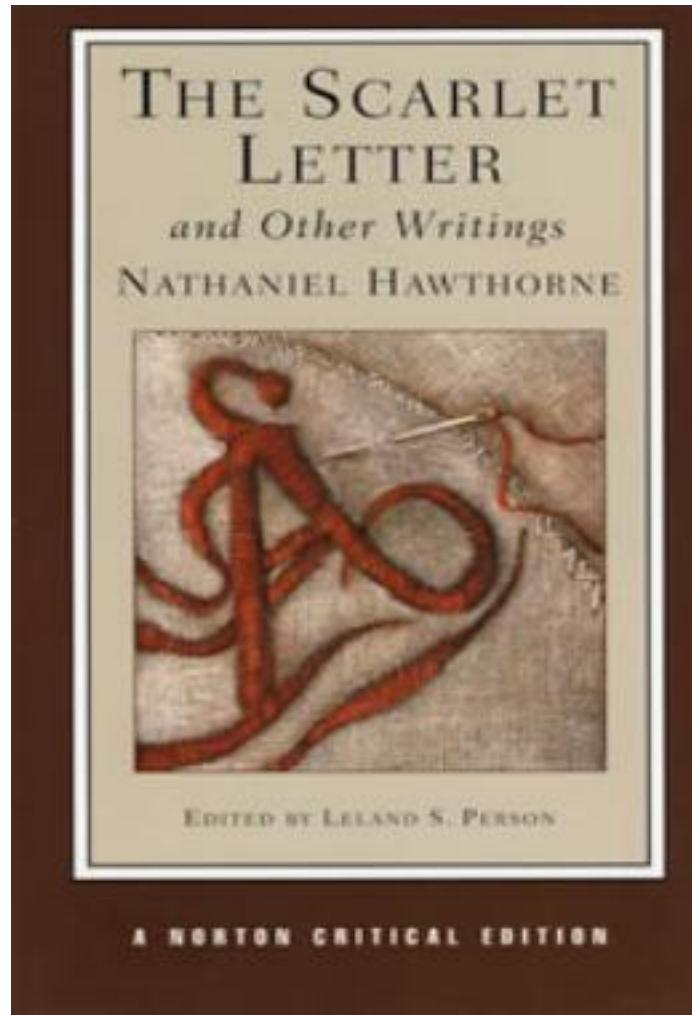
- Hawthorne's intellectual characters are usually villains, dreadful, chilling, and cold-blooded human animals, as Hollingsworth in *The Blithedale Romance*, Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* and Dr. Rappaccini in "Rappaccini's Daughter"

## IV. Hawthorne's Aesthetics



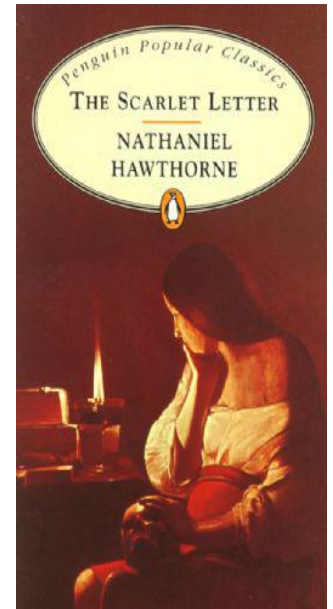
- a. Hawthorne repeatedly complained about "the poverty of materials" in a land where "there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight." Thus Hawthorne took a great interest in history and antiquity. To him these furnish the soil on which his mind grows to fruition.
- b. He was convinced that romance was the predestined form of American narrative. To tell the truth and satirize and yet not to offend: That was what Hawthorne had in mind to achieve.

# *The Scarlet Letter*

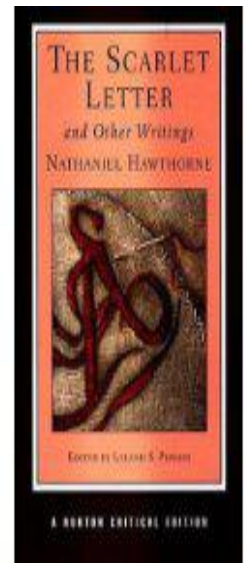


# Introduction

- 1) *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850, is a **Gothic American romance novel** written by Nathaniel Hawthorne; generally considered to be his masterpiece.
- 2) It is a **cultural allegory**, in which the author indirectly tells the future of Puritanism .
- 3) It is an example in which American Romanticism adapted itself to American Puritanism. Because of the strong influence of Puritanism in American society, Hawthorne only expressed his ideas on the sin indirectly by employing **symbolism**.

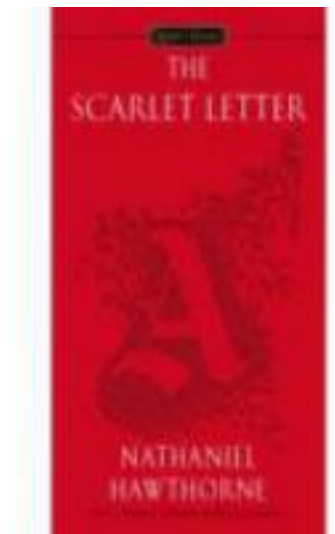


- *The Scarlet Letter*, always regarded as the best of his works, tells a simple but very moving story in which four people living in a Puritan community are involved in and affected by the sin of adultery in different ways.
- In this novel, Hawthorne does not intend to tell a love story nor a story of sin, but focuses his attention on the moral, emotional, and psychological effects or consequences of the sin on the people in general and those main characters in particular, so as to show us the tension between society and individuals. "The Custom-House" as an introductory note to *The Scarlet Letter* proves fruitful to Hawthorne's imagination.

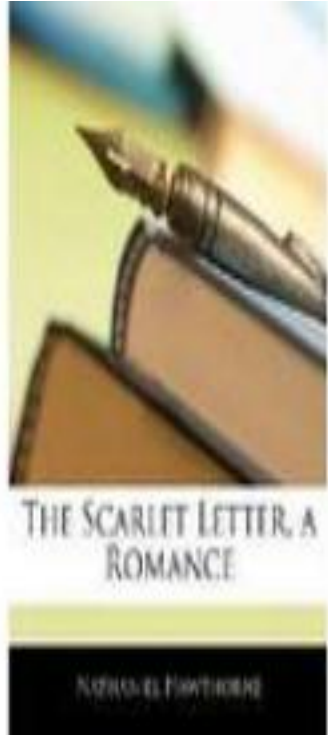


- By relating his own experience of discovering a small package that contains a piece of red cloth shaped like "A" when he was a surveyor in the Custom-House in Salem, Hawthorne succeeds in giving his tale a sense of historical reality and an air of authenticity, and demonstrates fully his artistic pursuit and his theory about "Romance".
- Hawthorne is a master of symbolism, which he took from the Puritan tradition and bequeathed to American literature in a revived form. The symbol can be found everywhere in his writing, and his masterpiece provides the most conclusive proof. By using Pearl as a thematic symbol, Hawthorne emphasizes the consequence the sin of adultery has brought to the community and people living in that community.

- With the scarlet letter A as the biggest symbol of all, Hawthorne proves himself to be one of the best symbolists. As a key to the whole novel, the letter A takes on different layers of symbolic meanings as the plot develops, but people come up with different interpretations and they do not know which one is definite. The scarlet letter A is ambiguous. And the **ambiguity** is one of the most important characteristics of Hawthorne's art.

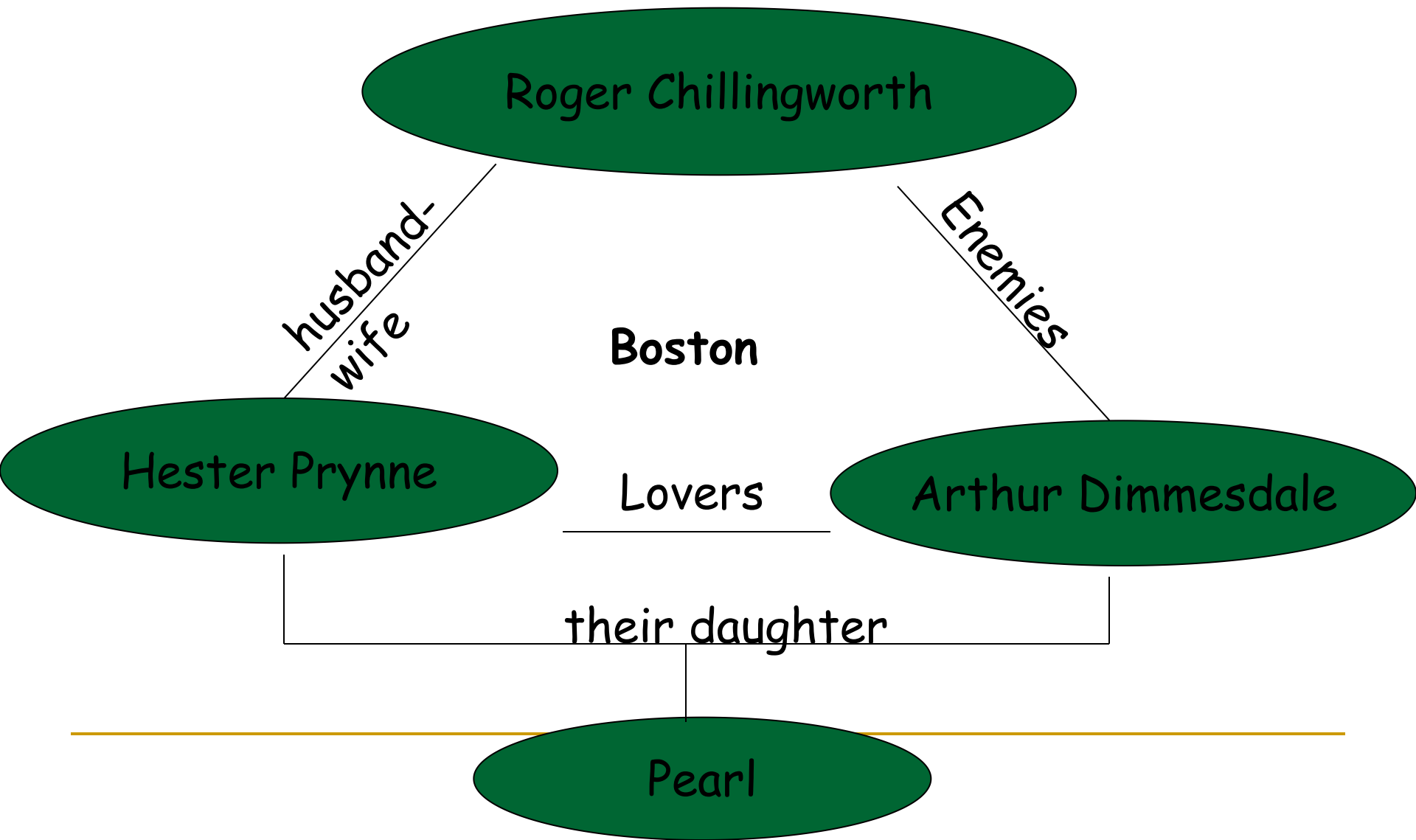


# 1. Setting



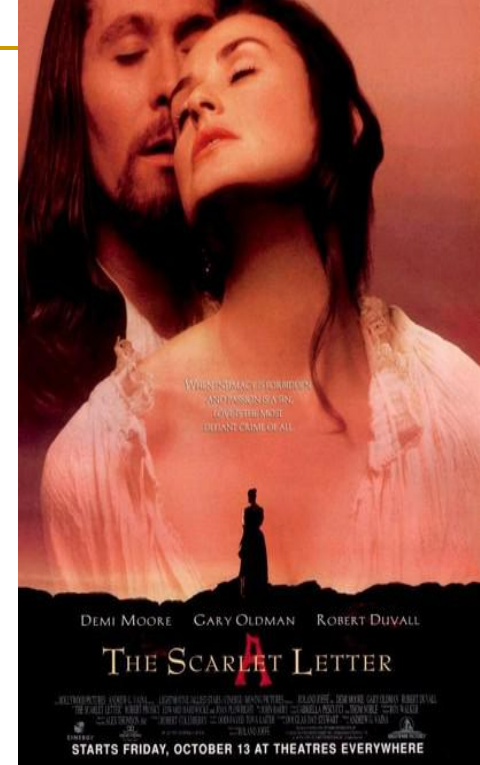
- The town of Boston, a colony of the Massachusetts Bay Company, in the years not long after the town's settlement in 1630. Boston's residents were Puritans, members of a religious movement founded in England. Puritans were so-called because of their attempt to purify Protestantism of Roman Catholic and Anglican influence. Their government was theocratic, and they emphasized divine guidance over human reason. Their moral code was strict and rigid.

## 2. Main Characters



### 3. Plot

- *The Scarlet Letter* tells the story of Hester Prynne, who gives birth after committing adultery, refuses to name the father, and struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity.
- It opens as Hester Prynne walks out of the prison to stand exposed on the public scaffold with a scarlet letter "A" on her breast as a lifelong sign of her sin of adultery. Hester gives birth to her daughter Pearl but refuses to reveal her sexual partner. When her long-separated husband Chillingworth comes to America and discovers her relations with the minister Dimmesdale, he is determined to punish the lovers spiritually.



- 
- When Dimmesdale cannot endure Chillingworth's humiliation and inner torment any longer he confesses his sin on the public scaffold before his death. Hester sustains all humiliation and proves to be strong-minded and capable woman. As she is ready to offer help and advice to other women in trouble, she is loved and respected by people in the town. She continues her life of penance and becomes a model of endurance, goodness, courage, and victory over sin.
-

## 4. Major themes

It is about adultery, but not about sex.

It is about punishment, but not about crime.

- The theme of the story should be the moral, emotional and psychological effects of sin on people and its redemption.
- A. sense of sin and evil (sin and punishment)
- B. tension between head (intellect) and heart (emotion)
- C. ambiguity (复义性)

## 5. Characterization

Hester Prynne—the visible “A”  
strong-willed, contemplative; independent;  
maternal; intelligent

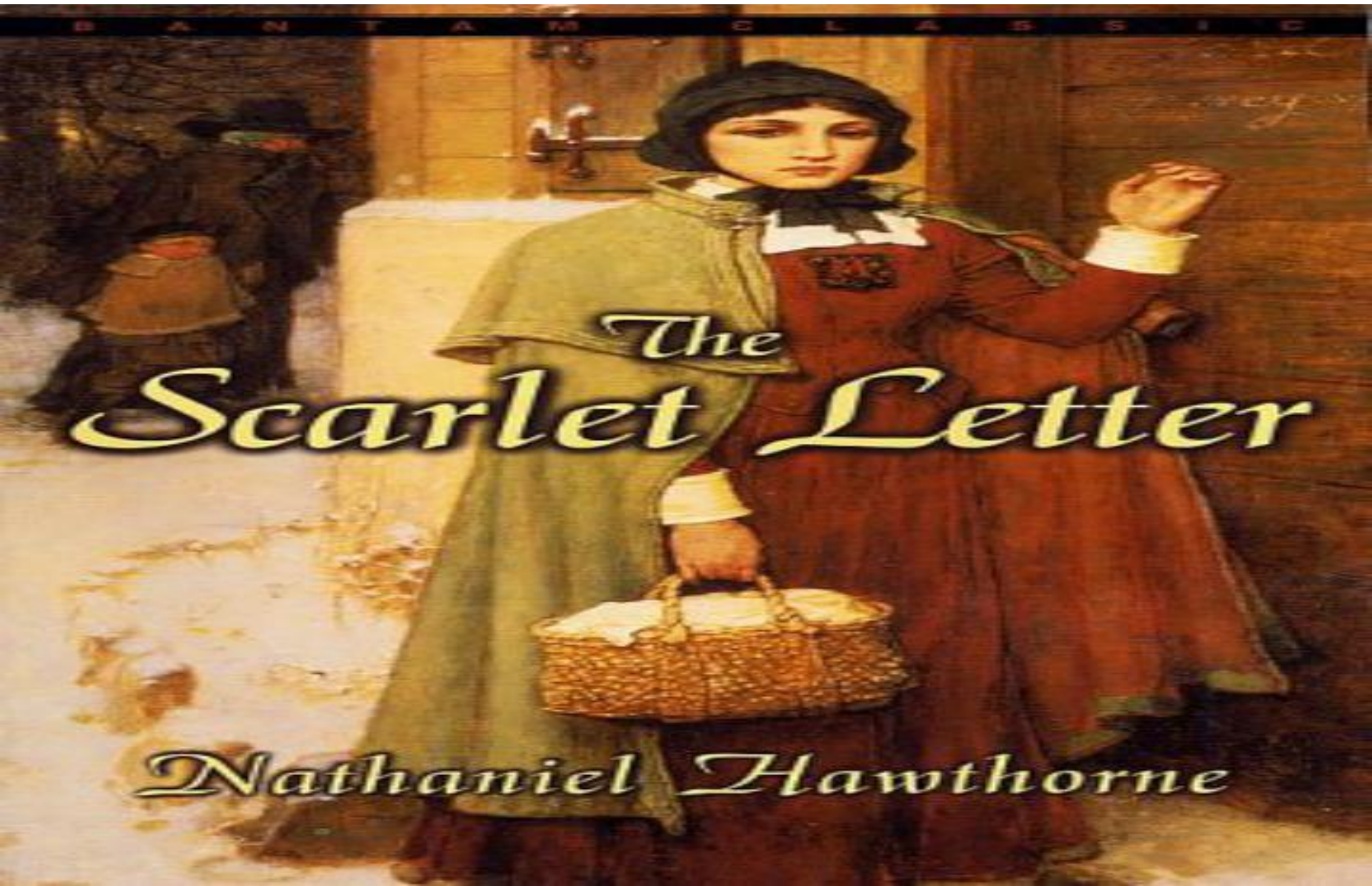
Arthur Dimmesdale — the invisible “A”  
loving, conscientious, reluctant to repent,  
Emotional and eloquent in preaching

Roger Chillingworth— the maker of “A”  
cold; indifferent; revenged; evil; malevolent

Pearl —the living “A”  
innocent, perceptive, insightful

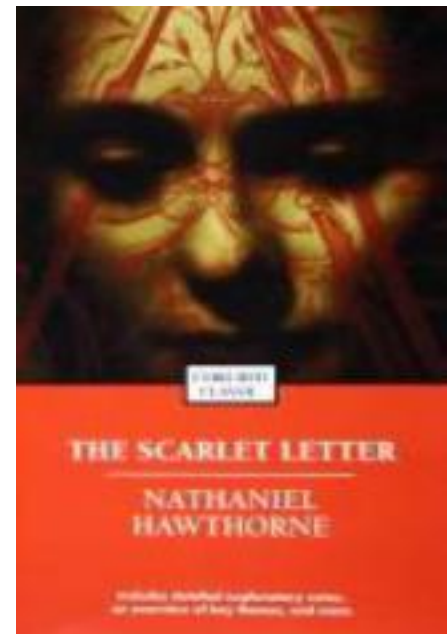


# Analysis of *The Scarlet Letter*

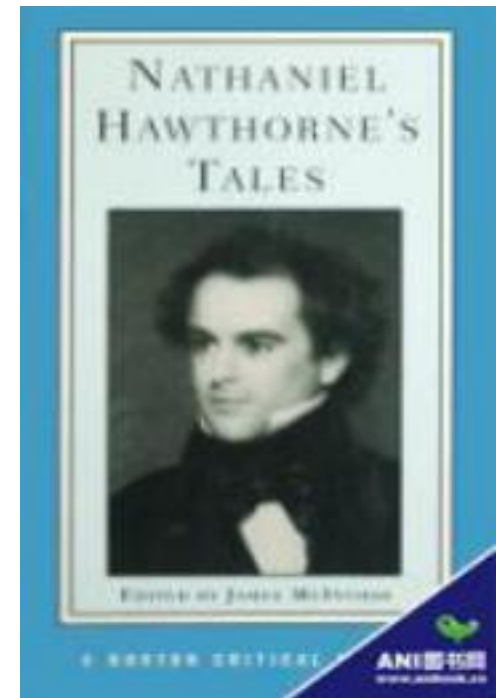


# Summary of Chapter 5

- Chapter 5 serves the purpose of filling in background information about Hester and Pearl and beginning the development of Hester and the scarlet as two of the major symbols of the romance. By positioning Hester's cottage between the town and the wilderness, physically isolated from the community, the author confirms and builds the image of her that was portrayed in the first scaffold scene—that of an outcast of society being punished for her sin/crime and as a product of nature, society views her "...as the figure, the body, the reality of sin."



- Despite Hester's apparent humility and her refusal to strike back at the community, she resents and inwardly rebels against the viciousness of her Puritan persecutors. She becomes a living symbol of sin to the townspeople, who view her not as an individual but as the embodiment of evil in the world.
- Twice in this chapter, Hawthorne alludes to the community's suing Hester's errant behavior as a testament of immorality. For moralists, she represents woman's frailty and sinful passion, and when she attends church, she is often the subject of the preacher's sermon.



- Banished by society to live her life forever as an outcast, Hester's skill in needlework is nevertheless in great demand. Hawthorne derisively condemns Boston's Puritan citizens throughout the novel, but here in chapter 5 his criticism is especially sharp.
- The very community members most appalled by Hester's past conduct favor her sewing skills, but they deem their demand for her work almost as charity, as if they are doing her the favor in having her sew garments for them. Their small-minded and contemptuous attitudes are best exemplified in their refusal to allow Hester to sew garments for weddings, as if she would contaminate the sacredness of marriage were she to do so.



- The irony between the townspeople's condemnation of Hester and her providing garments for them is even greater when we learn that Hester is not overly proud of her work, rejects ornamentation as a sin. We must remember that Hester, no matter how much she inwardly rebels against the hypocrisy of Puritan society, still conforms to the moral strictness associated with Puritanism.



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# Symbolic Meanings of "A" in *The Scarlet Letter*



# The physical letter A

- This "*affair of fine red cloth, much worn and faded*," notes the old fashioned stitching and the remains of gold embroidery, and tells us that "by an accurate measurement, each limb proved to be precisely three inches and a quarter in length."

Like any effective symbol, the scarlet letter achieves its symbolic status not in spite of but by reason of its literal texture. Before anything else, Hawthorne seems to say, *this is a scarlet letter; because of that, it is capable of further meaning.* The letter will have to carry the burden of the tale. And Hawthorne has taken a first step to insure its capacity to do so by making it seem more real than any other part of his story.

# The Symbolic Letter A

The scarlet      fire      passion and life

- *They averred, that the symbol was not mere scarlet cloth, tinged in an earthly dye-pot, but was re-hot with infernal fire, and could be seen glowing all right, whenever Hester Prynne walked abroad in the night-time. (Hawthorne, 1984: 95)*

**Warmth:** the acts of charity she performs to those in trouble

**Sin:** in the Bible, the Jezeble wears scarlet

**Torture:** fire in the hell

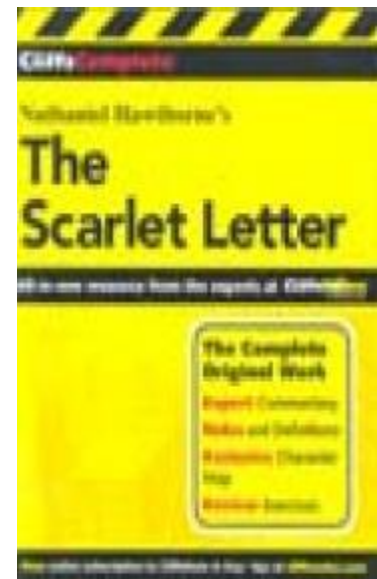
**Sacrifice:** to devote all their life and passion to religion

# Symbolic Meanings of the "A"

- The novel started with the embroidery letter A Hester wore and ended with the scarlet letter A engraved in the tombstone. Thus, the letter A is penetrated through the novel. The symbolic A is ambiguous.
- 1) Pearl— **Angel**
- 2) Chillingworth — **Avenge**
- 3) Prynne
- a). **Adultery** b). **Agony** or **Anguish** c). **Alone** or **Alienation** d). **Art** e). **Arrogance** f). **Admirable** g). **Affection** h). **Able** i). **Amazon** (Greek Mythology: A member of a nation of women warriors reputed to have lived in Scythia.) j) **Angel**
- 4) Dimmesdale
- a) AD — **adultery** b) the inner "A" (Adultery — **Agony** or **Anguish**) c) **Alienation**



- The scarlet letter is meant to be a symbol of shame, but instead it becomes a powerful symbol of identity to Hester. The letter's meaning shifts as time passes. Originally intended to mark Hester as an adulterer, the "A" eventually comes to stand for "Able" or "Angel".
- Besides Hester, Dimmesdale also ironed the letter A on his body, which provoked his self-consciousness and showed his repent for what he did.
- Pearl, their baby, wore a green letter A in a piece of seaweed while playing on the beach. This green letter A symbolizes vitality or new life, and also suggests her inheritance from her mother.



# The Role of Circumstance in Hawthorne's Novel

- Chillingworth's failure to return. After their marriage, Hester went to Boston alone, and she failed to expect Chillingworth's coming.
- People's Attitude
- All the people, including the governor, the priest and neighbours showed their ridiculous and indifferent attitudes towards her, which aroused her rebellious spirits.
- Suffering from several years of insult, Hester finally got acknowledged by the society. Especially, those women who had blamed her before showed respect for her now. Women began to realize that they are the victims of patriarchy society and Puritanism.

# Puritanism in *The Scarlet Letter*

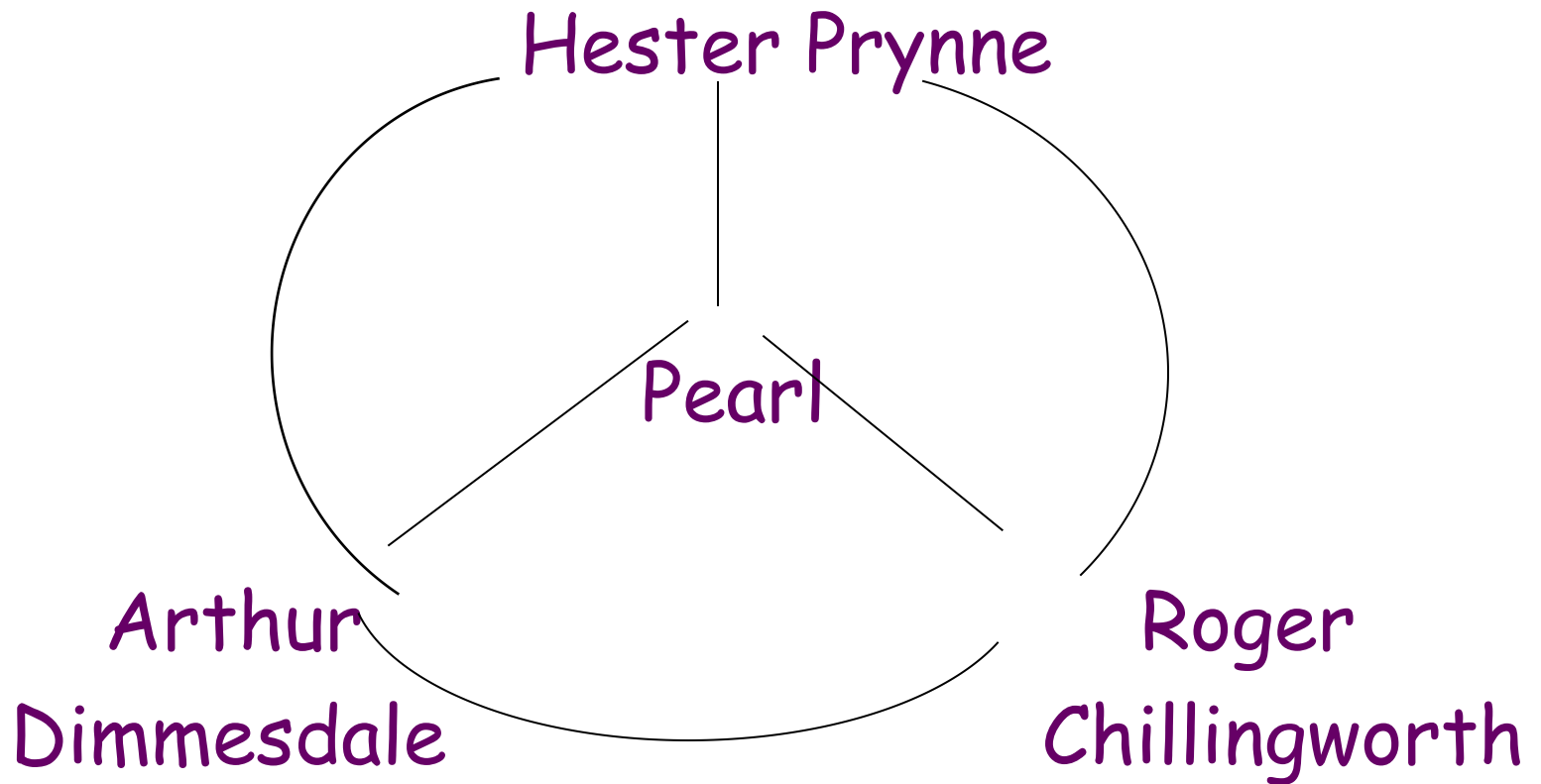


- **Puritan background:** setting, events, characters, thoughts, behaviors.
- **Puritan doctrines:** original sin, total depravity (the Calvinist doctrine that everyone is born in a state of corruption as a result of original sin), predestination, limited atonement.
- The novel expresses **Hawthorne's attitudes toward Puritanism**. Like puritans who concerned themselves with the original sin and developed it into their beliefs, Hawthorne concerns the novel with the same theme, and tries to establish his doctrines around it.

Through challenging Puritanism, Hawthorne aims to

- 1. Explore the source of evils: unreasonable and inhuman social system; men's inner world, defects in men's nature: strong desire, dishonesty, cowardice, revenge.
- 2. Explore the influences on different characters:
  - To brave men: gain moral rebirth, redeem their sin, win respect/love again.
  - To coward men: torment of conscience, suffer in hell fire.
  - To vicious and vengeful men: reduce them to demons, make them deteriorated, malicious, mean.
- 3. Explore ways of redeeming sin: brave to confess and face it, correct it through love, devotion, generosity and forgiveness.

# Implication of Protagonists' Names



in Puritan Boston of the 1640s

- Hester Prynne
- Hester: Hester in Greek mythology, Zeus's sister, a woman of beauty
- hastier (hasty)
- Prynne:
- Prune (If you prune something, you cut out all the parts that you do not need.): purify her sin
- pry: probe into the interior of one's heart
- Arthur Dimmesdale
- Arthur: Adam, adultery
- Dimmesdale: dim + dale: dim interior (to hide one's sin)
- Roger Chillingworth
- Roger: rogue (revenge)
- Chillingworth: chilly (cruel, inhumane)
- (induce Arthur to speak out his own sin)
- Pearl: good, pure and precious

# Artistic Features

- ❑ Style: graceful and polished in diction and rhetoric.
- ❑ Ambiguity in theme: his novel is thoughtful, full of mental activities. with his special interest in the psychological aspect of human beings, there isn't much action while he is good at exploring the complexity of human psychology.
- ❑ Techniques: symbol and allegory
- ❑ Hawthorne is a master of symbolism. The symbol can be found everywhere in his writing.

## Hawthorne's Contribution

- He pushes American Romantic fiction to its summit. He represents the peak of Romanticism and his *The Scarlet Letter* marks the peak of American Romantic literature.
- The employment of symbolic images :He sets an example of ample use of symbols in fiction by writing the first symbolic novel.
- The devotion to short stories: Together with Allan Poe, he creates modern short story theory.
- The ambiguous relation with Puritanism.
- The impact upon the Jamesian psychological realism: Together with Allan Poe, he creates psychoanalytic Romantic fiction in American literature. Poe—analysis of irrational or abnormal people; Hawthorne—uncover the hidden evils in human heart.
- The influence upon Melville .

# 《红字》赏析

- 作为一部历史题材的小说，《红字》描写了17世纪北美新英格兰清教社会的生活风貌。但是正如霍桑在小说的序言中所言，他要讲述的故事是具有“符合人的心灵的真实”，而并非刻意追求人物客观经历的绝对真实性。他将这部小说称之为“传奇”，旨在开拓一块“中立的领域”，使“现实”和“想象”的因素可以在此和谐地融为一体。就作品的主题而言，霍桑通过刻画特定的清教环境中的三种罪人，包括犯有“私通”行为的白兰，虚伪的狄姆斯台尔，以及疯狂报复的齐里沃斯，在较深的层次上探讨了清教社会的本质，尤其是人类本性中的善恶与社会环境的关系。

■ 与他同时代的许多作家一样，霍桑也擅长使用象征的手法。在《红字》中，这一创作特征尤为引人注目。白兰被迫在胸前的佩戴的红字“A”，与狄姆斯台尔暗自烙在胸膛上的“A”一样，是寓意为“私通”的象征性符号，表明他们在道德价值观方面与当时正统清教意识形态的尖锐冲突，以及因为他们的违规行为而必须受到惩罚。狄姆斯台尔藏在胸膛上的红字，一方面提示他在躲避自己必须承担的责任和义务，掩饰内在的痛苦，从而与他的派岸然而为人爱戴的牧师形象形成具别动态演变的特征。例如，由于白兰的人物形象随着故事不同的象征意义，由代表“私通”转化为指代“天使”（angel）和“才干”（able）。此外，齐里沃斯老迈，而且他病态的体表特征也是其内在人格缺陷的彰显写照。

- 小说叙事结构的设计独具匠心。霍桑致力于表现重大冲突发生之后的故事，而并非以故事的自然发展时间为序叙述冲突发生的前因后果。因此，小说一开篇便描写白兰与狄姆斯台尔东窗事发，她与女儿珍珠被囚禁于监狱并面临法庭审判的情形。冲突陡然凸现，不仅加强了故事的张力，而且使这一情境中的每个人物的一举一动都更为典型地提示其个性的本质特征。在故事正文文本之外，小说还附有作为序言的“海关”一文，内容与作品的虚构叙事部分组成一个有机的整体。其中，霍桑大致交代了故事发生时的历史文化背景以及他的小说创作理论和对于社会本质的见解。

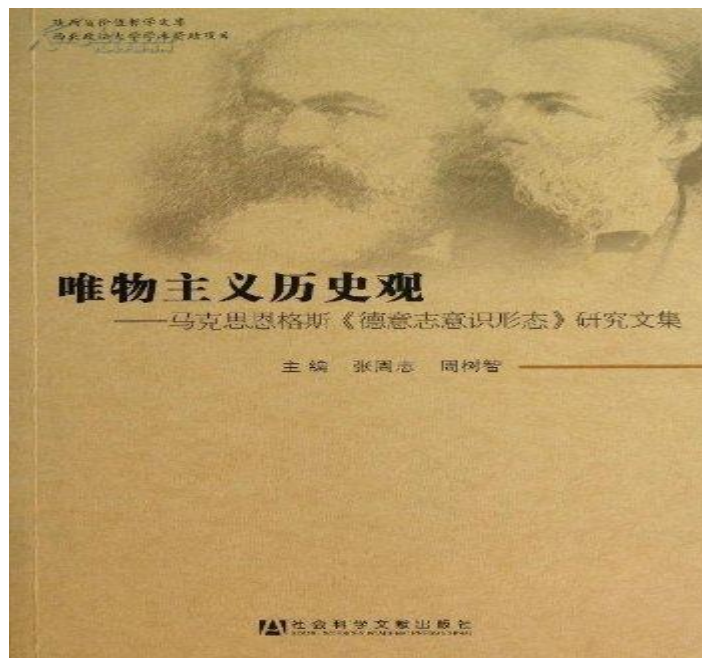
# Reflective Questions

- How do you evaluate the love between Hester and Dimmesdale?
- Is the love moral?
- How was Puritanism reflected in the novel?



# 思政启发

## ■ 历史观、文化观、唯物主义辩证观



# Assignment

- Preview Herman Melville and *Moby Dick*
- 1. Analyze the character of Ahab. Do you think that he is a tragic hero?
- 2. Study the symbolism in *Moby Dick*.

