

The Scarlet Letter Book Notes

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Author/Context

Nathaniel Hawthorne (July 4, 1804 - May 19, 1864), who could trace his lineage directly to a judge in the Salem Witch Trials, was the son of a naval captain who died when Nathaniel was four. Nathaniel and his two sisters were raised by their mother, who practiced, after being widowed, a life of almost complete solitude. Nathaniel was slightly lame as a young child, and subsequently spent a great deal of his time reading the great literary masters.

In 1821, at the age of 17, Hawthorne left Salem to live with his uncle at Sebago Lake, Maine and attend Bowdoin college. Apparently a hearty socializer during college, Hawthorne only began serious writing after returning to Massachusetts. "If I had sooner made my escape into the world, I should have grown hard and rough, and been covered with earthly dust, and my heart might have become callous by rude encounters with the multitude.... But living in solitude till the fullness of time was come, I still kept the dew of my youth with the freshness of my heart." (*American Note-Books*, 219, as quoted in the *Dictionary of American Biography*).

His first move after college was to the Brook Farm in West Roxbury, Mass., a gathering place for many of the leading transcendentalists of the era. Hawthorne spent only a few years there, and soon became disillusioned by the ideas of his fellow residents.

He returned to Salem, spent summers traveling around New England and New York, and there met and eventually married Sophia Amelia Peabody, a marriage that provided both happiness and inspiration to Hawthorne. During this period, Hawthorne published an influential and popular collection of short stories, *Twice-told Tales*. The two moved to Concord, Mass., where Hawthorne continued a lifelong, close friendship with Henry David Thoreau.

Because literary fame came late to Hawthorne, he was forced to work for a number of years as the Surveyor of Port at Salem, leaving Concord, which he loved dearly. Later, after political changes forced him to leave his surveyor position, Hawthorne moved with his growing family to Lenox, Mass. in the Berkshires. During this period, Hawthorne wrote and published some of his greatest works: *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, and *The Blithedale Romance*. It was here that he befriended Herman Melville, who later dedicated *Moby Dick* to Hawthorne.

After a subsequent move back to the Boston vicinity, and after his wife's death, Hawthorne was appointed United States Consul to Liverpool, England, and made his first voyage to Europe. Hawthorne spent seven years overseas, taking a number of trips throughout the continent, and wrote almost nothing during his years there. He returned to Salem at the end of his life, and completed a few sketches about his experiences in Europe, and a final novel, *The Marble Faun*.

Hawthorne remains a major American novelist. His work is unique in its lack of narrative structure; for example, the only thing that holds the *Scarlet Letter* together is its strong



uniformity of tone. He felt the need for a new national literary voice, one that examined "the individual ajar in the world." (*Academic American Encyclopedia*). Many of his earlier short stories, including "Young Goodman Brown," and "The Gray Champion," deal with historical ideological conflict and egotism as the cause of solitude.

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Plot Summary

The Narrator tells us that he found some documents telling the story of a Scarlet Letter used by a woman named Hester Prynne from Boston, Massachusetts in the early seventeenth century. He goes on to write an embellished version of the story.

The story begins with Hester Prynne, who has just given birth to an illegitimate daughter, leaving the prison to serve her sentence of standing in the town scaffolds for an hour with her three-month-old baby. She has also been required to wear a red letter "A," to stand for Adulteress, on her chest. Hester has embroidered the A with beautiful gold thread and amazing artistry. While Hester is standing on the scaffold, Roger Chillingworth, who appears to recognize her, appears out of the woods. Hester is also asked to name the man with whom she sins, but refuses.

The years pass and Hester's daughter Pearl grows into an impetuous little girl. Hester has moved with Pearl into a small cottage on the outskirts of town and makes her living by embroidering and sewing clothing for the townspeople. Roger Chillingworth, who turns out to be Hester's long presumed-dead husband from Europe, befriends Hester's Pastor, Arthur Dimmesdale, and the two eventually move in together. Chillingworth has billed himself as a physician, and therefore able to care for Dimmesdale, who is in very poor health. In a rare moment when Dimmesdale lets his guard down, Chillingworth discovers an open, self-inflicted wound on Dimmesdale's chest.

Dimmesdale's health continues to decline, and Chillingworth's character changes noticeably. He becomes a demon-like presence in Dimmesdale's life. Hester notices this change in Chillingworth and confronts him. It is suddenly clear that Chillingworth has determined that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father, and that Chillingworth intends to make Dimmesdale's life a living hell. Hester understands the gravity of the situation and decides to tell Dimmesdale who Chillingworth really is. At first, when Chillingworth first entered the settlement, he had sworn Hester to secrecy about his true identity. Hester decides that, for the sake of Dimmesdale's sanity, she must warn him about Chillingworth's character.

In a surprise and secret meeting with Arthur Dimmesdale, Hester reveals her secret, and begs a defeated and angry Dimmesdale for forgiveness. He eventually grants forgiveness, and agrees to leave the colony with Hester and Pearl as soon as possible. Unfortunately, somehow Chillingworth manages to find out about their secret plan to leave, and books passage on the same boat bound for Europe. In the meantime, Dimmesdale prepares for his final sermon, the Election Sermon given on the day the local officials are sworn into office. He writes and re-writes a dramatic speech which proclaims his sinful nature, which none of his parishioners can understand or accept. Dimmesdale is known as a brilliant and inspirational preacher, and his congregation is convinced of his godliness. After the exhausting sermon is over, Dimmesdale leaves the church and approaches the town scaffold. As he climbs the steps, he comes upon Hester and Pearl standing in the shadows, and pulls them onto the scaffold with him. In



that moment, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale bares his chest wound to the congregation, and takes Pearl's hand to confess his fatherhood. He then dies.

After this dramatic admission and Dimmesdale's death, Chillingworth no longer has anything to live for. He dies shortly thereafter. Hester and Pearl go to Europe for many years, and Hester eventually returns without her daughter. No one knows where Pearl is, although Hester is seen sewing extravagant baby clothing that no one in the colony would ever use. In addition, Hester continues to receive letters from a man of great means throughout the rest of her life. She lives a long life, and serves as counselor to many troubled women, as well as a giver of charity. When she dies, Hester is buried next to Dimmesdale's sunken grave under a tombstone that says "On a Field, Sable, the Letter A, Gules."



Major Characters

Arthur Dimmesdale: A well-respected and learned pastor in Boston. Arthur is Hester Prynne's pastor and the father of her illegitimate child. A sickly man, he constantly appears as if he is in pain. He is pale and thin, and speaks in a tremulous voice.

Governor Bellingham: The Governor of Massachusetts during this period, and a well-respected leader of the community.

Mistress Hibbins: Governor Bellingham's widowed sister, who is executed as a witch during the Salem Witch trials during the time span of the book. A notorious and colorful character.

Hester Prynne: The main character in the book. A young married woman from Europe who has come to Boston without her husband. She is beautiful – black hair, black eyes, and shining skin. She has an illegitimate child, Pearl, with Arthur Dimmesdale.

Pearl: Hester Prynne's illegitimate daughter with the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. A naughty, temperamental child, who nevertheless is quite beautiful.

Roger Chillingworth: Hester Prynne's husband from Europe. A learned man of many skills who poses as a physician to get close to Arthur Dimmesdale. He is ugly, and his shoulder is slightly deformed.

Minor Characters

Mr. Wilson: A pastor in the Boston area; an old man who respects and is respected by Arthur Dimmesdale.

Three Ladies at the Prison Door: Female, married residents of Boston who are waiting at the prison door to see Hester as she appears for the first time with her daughter, Pearl.

Master Brackett: The jailer and town officer who announces Hester's appearance from the prison, and who pushes Hester out the door of the jail when she first emerges.

Deacon: A pious old man confronted by Arthur Dimmesdale while he is struggling not to say evil things inspired by the devil.

Commander of the Spanish Pirate Ship: A colorful character who has license, simply because of his station, to wear outrageous things and act inappropriately by Puritanical standards.

Narrator – Surveyor of Revenue: The narrator is assumed to be the direct voice of the author, Nathaniel Hawthorne.



permanent Inspector': A man who inherited his position in the Customs House from a long line of men in his family. This is his career, from which he has complete job security.

General Miller – Collector: A former hero from the War of 1812, who retired to a job in the Salem Custom House. A man with a great deal of presence, but very frail and old when we meet him.

Collector's Junior Clerk: Assistant to General Miller. The only person educated and interested enough to have literary conversations with Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Jonathan Pue – Surveyor: A Custom House employee from a number of years ago who died suddenly, leaving some undiscovered personal papers in the Custom House building. These papers include documents recounting the story of the scarlet letter, as well as the letter itself. This story was of great personal interest to Mr. Pue.



Objects/Places

The Custom House: The legal point of entry at Salem, Massachusetts for cargo ships. The scene of the Introductory chapter of the *Scarlet Letter*, where the narrator finds the scarlet letter itself wrapped in a paper detailing the story of Hester Prynne.

The Scarlet Letter: A small piece of red cloth, with a capital A embroidered in gold on it. Made by Hester Prynne while in the jail cell where she went to give birth to her bastard child. Worn by Hester Prynne as punishment for her crime of adultery for the rest of her life. It is highly ornate and a contrast to the somber dress of the Puritan settlement.

Prison Door: The door to the prison where Hester spends her pregnancy and the three months following, prior to serving her sentence of standing on the town scaffolds. The scene of her first private meeting with Roger Chillingworth.

Wild Rose Bush: Located just outside the prison door, it is the only sign of life near the prison, and has a single red blossom on it.

Town Scaffolds: The scene of Hester's punishment. She must stand upon the scaffolds for an hour with her baby in her arms. There she is asked to name the father of her child, but refuses.

Town Square: The center of town, which includes the town scaffolds.

Boston: The colonial city where the story of Hester Prynne takes place. Although the novel begins in the Salem Customs House, the action of the story takes place in early Boston. One of the first English settlements in the New World, and the home of the Puritans, a religious sect whose strict beliefs governed the laws and behavior of the entire population.

Salem: Home of the Salem Customs House, where the novel begins. Salem was also the site of famous witch trials, and the ancestral home of Hawthorne himself.



Quotes

Quote 1: "Here, in a word, - and it is a rare instance in my life, - I had met with a person thoroughly adapted to the situation which he held." Introductory, pg. 24

Quote 2: "But the object that most drew my attention, in the mysterious package, was a certain affair of fine red cloth, much worn and faded....It had been wrought, as was easy to perceive, with wonderful skill of needlework....This rag of scarlet cloth,- for time and wear and a sacrilegious moth had reduced it to little other than a rag,- on careful examination, assumed the shape of a letter. It was the capital letter A. By an accurate measurement, each limb proved to be precisely three inches and a quarter in length. It had been intended, there could be no doubt, as an ornamental article of dress; but how it was to be worn, or what rank, honor, and dignity, in by-past times, were signified by it, was a riddle which...I saw little hope of solving." Introductory, pg. 30

Quote 3: "...I happened to place it on my breast....It seemed to me then, that I experienced a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of a burning heat; and as if the letter were not of red cloth, but red-hot iron. I shuddered, and involuntarily let it fall upon the floor." Introductory, pg. 31

Quote 4: "[O]n one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him." Chapter 1, pg. 46

Quote 5: "On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony." Chapter 2, pg. 50

Quote 6: "When he found the eyes of Hester Prynne fastened on his own, and saw that she appeared to recognize him, he slowly and calmly raised his finger, made a gesture with it in the air, and laid it on his lips." Chapter 3, pg. 57

Quote 7: "he will be known." Chapter 3, pg. 59

Quote 8: "'Never!' Replied Hester Prynne, looking, not at Mr. Wilson, but into the deep and troubled eyes of the younger clergyman [Dimmesdale]. 'It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine!'" Chapter 3, pg. 64

Quote 9: "But there is a fatality, a feeling so irresistible and inevitable that it has the force of doom, which almost invariably compels human beings to linger around and



haunt, ghostlike, the spot where some great and marked event has given the color to their lifetime; and still the more irresistibly, the darker the tinge that saddens it." Chapter 5, pg. 73

Quote 10: "But it is not recorded that, in a single instance, her skill was called in aid to embroider the white veil which was to cover the pure blushes of a bride." Chapter 5, pg. 76

Quote 11: "Throughout all, however, there was a trait of passion, a certain depth of hue....The child could not be made amenable to rules....The mother's impassioned state had been the medium through which were transmitted to the unborn infant the rays of its moral life; and, however white and clear originally, they had taken the deep stains of crimson and gold, the fiery lustre, the black shadow, and the untempered light of the intervening substance. Above all, the warfare of Hester's spirit, at that epoch, was perpetuated in Pearl." Chapter 6, pg. 83

Quote 12: "There was a fire in her [Pearl] and throughout her; she seemed the unpremeditated offshoot of a passionate moment." Chapter 7, pg. 93

Quote 13: "'No, my little Pearl!' said her mother. 'Thou must gather thine own sunshine. I have none to give thee!'" Chapter 7, pg. 95

Quote 14: "'I am my mother's child,' answered the scarlet vision, 'and my name is Pearl!'" Chapter 8, pg. 101

Quote 15: "After putting her finger in her mouth, with many ungracious refusals to answer good Mr. Wilson's questions, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door." Chapter 8, pg. 103

Quote 16: "'Speak thou for me!' cried she. 'Thou wast my pastor, and hadst charge of my soul, and knowest me better than these men can. I will not lose the child! Speak for me! Thou knowest, - for thou hast sympathies which these men lack! - thou knowest what is in my heart, and what are a mother's rights, and how much the stronger they are, when that mother has but her child and the scarlet letter! Look thou to it! I will not lose the child! Look to it!'" Chapter 8, pg. 104

Quote 17: "Roger Chillingworth - the man of skill, the kind and friendly physician - strove to go deep into his patient's bosom, delving among his principles, prying into his recollections, and probing everything with a cautious touch, like a treasure-seeker in a dark cavern. Few secrets can escape an investigator, who has opportunity and license to undertake such a quest, and skill to follow it up. A man burdened with a secret should especially avoid the intimacy of his physician." Chapter 9, pg. 114

Quote 18: "Trusting no man as his friend, he could not recognize his enemy when the latter actually appeared." Chapter 10, pg. 120



Quote 19: "Even in the graveyard here at hand....They are new to me. I found them growing on a grave, which bore no tombstone, nor other memorial of the dead man, save these ugly weeds, that have taken upon themselves to keep him in remembrance. They grew out of his heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him, and which he had done better to confess during his lifetime.' 'Perchance,' said Mr. Dimmesdale, 'he earnestly desired it, but could not.'" Chapter 10, pg. 120

Quote 20: "Come away, mother! Come away, or yonder old Black Man will catch you! He hath got hold of the minister already. Come away, mother, or he will catch you! But he cannot catch little Pearl!" Chapter 10, pg. 123

Quote 21: "But, if it be the soul's disease, then do I commit myself to the one Physician of the soul!...But who are thou, that meddlest in this matter? - that dares thrust himself between the sufferer and his God?" Chapter 10, pp. 125-6

Quote 22: "But with what a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror! With what a ghastly rapture....making itself even riotously manifest by the extravagant gesture with which he threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot upon the floor! Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom." Chapter 10, pg. 127

Quote 23: "a quiet depth of malice, hitherto latent, but active now...which led him to imagine a more intimate revenge than any mortal had ever wreaked upon an enemy." Chapter 11, pg. 128

Quote 24: "To the untrue man, the whole universe is false,- it is impalpable,- it shrinks to nothing within his grasp....The only truth that continued to give Mr. Dimmesdale a real existence on this earth was the anguish in his inmost soul" Chapter 11, pg. 134

Quote 25: "Come up hither, Hester, thou and little Pearl....Ye have both been here before, but I was not with you. Come up hither once again, and we will stand all three together!" Chapter 12, pg. 140

Quote 26: "Satan dropped it there, I take it, intending a scurrilous jest against your reverence. But, indeed, he was blind and foolish, as he ever and always is. A pure hand needs no glove to cover it!" Chapter 12, pg. 145

Quote 27: "...which we interpret to stand for Angel. For as our good Governor Winthrop was made an angel this past night, it was doubtless held fit that there should be some notice thereof." Chapter 12, pg. 145

Quote 28: "[M]any people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength." Chapter 13, pg. 148

Quote 29: "All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up by this red-hot brand, and had long ago fallen away, leaving a bare and harsh outline,



which might have been repulsive, had she possessed friends or companions to be repelled by it." Chapter 13, pp. 149-50

Quote 30: "[T]here seemed to be no longer anything in Hester's face for Love to dwell upon" Chapter 13, pg. 150

Quote 31: "It is remarkable that persons who speculate the most boldly often conform with the most perfect quietude to the external regulations of society." Chapter 13, pg. 151

Quote 32: "It lies not in the pleasure of the magistrates to take off this badge....Were I worthy to be quit of it, it would fall away of its own nature, or be transformed into something that should speak a different purport." Chapter 14, pg. 155

Quote 33: "'I have already told thee what I am! Fiend! Who made me so?' 'It was myself!' cried Hester, shuddering. 'It was I, not less than he. Why has thou not avenged thyself on me?' 'I have left thee to the scarlet letter,' replied Roger Chillingworth. 'If that have not avenged me, I can do no more!' He laid his finger on it, with a smile. 'It has avenged thee!' answered Hester Prynne." Chapter 14, pg. 158

Quote 34: "'Truly do I!' Answered Pearl, looking brightly into her mother's face. 'It is for the same reason that the minister keeps his hand over his heart!'" Chapter 15, pg. 166

Quote 35: "'Mother,' said little Pearl, 'the sunshine does not love you. It runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on your bosom. Now see! There it is, playing a good way off. Stand you here, and let me run and catch it. I am but a child. It will not flee from me, for I wear nothing on my bosom yet!' 'Nor ever will, my child, I hope,' said Hester. 'And why not, mother?' asked Pearl, stopping short, just at the beginning of her race. 'Will not it come of its own accord, when I am a woman grown?' 'Run away, child,' answered her mother, 'and catch the sunshine! It will soon be gone.'" Chapter 16, pg. 168

Quote 36: "'But mother, tell me now! Is there such a Black Man? And didst thou ever meet him? And is this his mark?'....'Once in my life I met the Black Man!' said her mother. 'This scarlet letter is his mark!'" Chapter 16, pg. 170

Quote 37: "Death was too definite an object to be wished for or avoided." Chapter 16, pg. 173

Quote 38: "Thou little knowest what a relief it is, after the torment of a seven years' cheat, to look into an eye that recognizes me for what I am!" Chapter 17, pg. 176

Quote 39: "'I might have known it,' murmured he. 'I did know it! Was not the secret told me, in the natural recoil of my heart, at the first sight of him, and as often as I have seen him? Why did I not understand? O Hester Prynne, thou little, little knowest all the horror of this thing! And the shame! - the indelicacy! - the horrible ugliness of this exposure of a sick and guilty heart to the very eye that would gloat over it! Woman, woman, thou art accountable for this! I cannot forgive thee!'" Chapter 17, pg. 178



Quote 40: "There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheek, that had been long so pale." Chapter 18, pg. 185

Quote 41: "'I have a strange fancy,' observed the sensitive minister, 'that this brook is the boundary between two worlds, and that thou canst never meet thy Pearl again'" Chapter 19, pg. 191

Quote 42: "'At least, they shall say of me,' thought this exemplary man, 'that I leave no public duty unperformed, nor ill performed!'" Chapter 20, pg. 197

Quote 43: "The physician knew then, that, in the minister's regard, he was no longer a trusted friend, but his bitterest enemy." Chapter 20, pg. 204

Quote 44: "'What a strange, sad man is he!' said the child, as if speaking partly to herself. 'In the dark night-time he calls us to him, and holds thy hand and mine, as when we stood with him on the scaffold yonder. And in the deep forest, where only the old trees can hear, and the strip of sky see it, he talks with thee, sitting on a heap of moss! And he kisses my forehead, too, so that the little brook would hardly wash it off! But here, in the sunny day, and among all the people, he knows us not; nor must we know him! A strange, sad man is he, with his hand always over his heart!'" Chapter 21, pg. 209

Quote 45: "There was no feebleness of step, as at other times; his frame was not bent; nor did his hand rest ominously upon his heart. Yet, if the clergyman were rightly viewed, his strength seemed not of the body...so abstracted was his look, it might be questioned whether Mr. Dimmesdale even heard the music [of the procession]." Chapter 22, pp. 217-218

Quote 46: "Pearl either saw and responded to her mother's feelings, or herself felt the remoteness and intangibility that had fallen around the minister... 'Mother,' said she, 'was that the same minister that kissed me by the brook?'" Chapter 22, pg. 219

Quote 47: "so intimately that the sermon had throughout a meaning for her, entirely apart from its indistinguishable words." Chapter 22, pg. 221

Quote 48: "At the final hour, when she was so soon to fling aside the burning letter, it had strangely become the center of more remark and excitement, and was thus made to sear her breast more painfully than at any time since the first day she put it on." Chapter 22, pg. 225

Quote 49: "The glow, which they had just before beheld burning on his cheek, was extinguished, like a flame that sinks down hopelessly among the late-decaying embers. It seemed hardly the face of a man alive, with such a deathlike hue; it was hardly a man with life in him that tottered on his path so nervelessly, yet tottered, and did not fall!" Chapter 23, pg. 228



Quote 50: "'Ha, tempter! Methinks thou art too late!' answered the minister, encountering his eye, fearfully, but firmly. 'Thy power is not what it was! With God's help, I shall escape thee now!'" Chapter 23, pg. 230

Quote 51: "'Thou hast escaped me!' he repeated more than once.... 'May God forgive thee!' said the minister. 'Thou, too, hast deeply sinned!'" Chapter 23, pp. 232-233

Quote 52: "Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled." Chapter 23, pg. 233

Quote 53: "Hush, Hester, hush!...The law was broke! - the sin here so awfully revealed! - let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear! It may be that, when we forgot our God, - when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul, - it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion." Chapter 23, pg. 233

Quote 54: "that the awful symbol was the effect of the ever-active tooth of remorse, gnawing from the inmost heart outwardly, and at last manifesting Heaven's dreadful judgment by the visible presence of the letter." Chapter 24, pg. 234

Quote 55: "Hester comforted and counseled them as best she might. She assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness." Chapter 24, pg. 239

Quote 56: "a new grave was delved, near an old and sunken one, in that burial-ground beside which King's Chapel has since been built. It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tombstone served for both." Chapter 24, pg. 239

Quote 57: "On a Field, Sable, the Letter A, Gules." Chapter 24, pg. 240



Topic Tracking: Burning

Burning 1: The narrator puts the tattered scarlet letter to his chest and feels a burning sensation in his body.

Burning 2: Hester, speaking about the effect of the scarlet letter, says that it is branded deeply, and cannot be removed simply by ceasing to wear the piece of cloth.

Burning 3: Townspeople claim that the scarlet letter glows and burns and is magic.

Burning 4: Pearl is described as having fire in her.

Burning 5: The red-hot brand of the scarlet letter is said to have dried Hester up.

Burning 6: Chillingworth appears as if his soul is on fire.

Burning 7: In a large and unfamiliar crowd, Hester's letter is the subject of much excitement. It feels to her as if it is burning.

Burning 8: Dimmesdale, as he leaves the church after the Election Sermon, looks as if all the red has drained from his cheeks - they are almost deathlike.



Topic Tracking: Law

Law in the new Massachusetts Puritan colony is equated with religious and moral law. In addition, people believe that the law of heaven, with its separation of good and evil, the sinners from the righteous, is the highest and truest law. This is closely linked to the idea that the destiny of people who have broken the law is determined, and they must fight their destiny for the rest of their lives.

Law 1: The narrator (Nathaniel Hawthorne) feels guilt because his ancestors persecuted people in the Salem Witch Trials, under a strict set of laws.

Law 2: The old, semi-retired employees of the Custom House fear Hawthorne because they are lax in their enforcement of the law, whereas Hawthorne is not.

Law 3: In the new colony of Boston, the Jail, which was considered the central place of law enforcement, and the cemetery were the first two structures to be erected.

Law 4: The scaffolds, where people are punished in accordance with the strict laws of the Puritans, were often used.

Law 5: The Beadle, who enforces and carries out the laws at the Jail, is described as "grim and grisly," and a "black shadow."

Law 6 and 7: The townspeople are shocked by the scarlet letter and its garishness because it goes against the strict laws of the land, which are closely associated with religion.

Law 8: Chillingworth observes Hester and Pearl from a high window as Pearl plays in the town square, and says "There is no law...mixed up with that child's composition." (pg. 123)

Law 9: The townspeople copy a great Elizabethan, English tradition which is much more showy and elaborate than anything that exists in the New World. However, this previously rejected tradition lends credence and validity to the new government.

Law 10: The Election sermon, which is the most important event of the year, is a mix of law and religion.

Law 11: Dimmesdale refers to the Heavenly law of marriage that was broken by he and Hester, and how that transgression may prevent the two from ever meeting in heaven.



Topic Tracking: Red

Red 1: The wild rose bush is red, and very visible by the side of the prison-door, which is otherwise barren and desolate.

Red 2: Hester Prynne's scarlet letter is bright red (scarlet), and much more showy and bright than anything normally allowed or accepted in the colony of Massachusetts.

Red 3: Governor Bellingham, the Reverends Wilson and Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth see Pearl dressed in a bright red and gold outfit, and call her "Ruby," "Coral," and "Red Rose."

Red 4: In secret, Dimmesdale uses a whip to inflict a bloody, red wound over his heart.

Red 5: Dimmesdale, while standing on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl, sees a meteorite pass through the sky, and take the shape of a red "A."

Red 6: Hester speaks to Chillingworth, and notices when she looks in his eyes, that there is a red spark in his eyes, like something is burning inside.

Red 7: Pearl, while off playing, replicates Hester's scarlet letter in bright green seaweed laid across her own chest.

Red 8: As Hester lets her hair down, a red flush appears on her cheeks for the first time since before she put on the scarlet letter.

Red 9: In public Hester, after many years of shame brought by her community, looks dead white, without a hint of red in her cheeks.



Topic Tracking: Truth

The observers (as opposed to the direct participants) in the story are ironically the ones closest to understanding the link between a person's sin and their destiny. These observers often notice the hidden truths.

Truth 1: Infant Pearl reaches her arms towards Dimmesdale at the end of his speech, in which he implored Hester to name the man who made her pregnant.

Truth 2: Pearl says that she did not come from the Heavenly Father.

Truth 3: When asked who she is, Pearl says she is her mother's child. This is especially significant because it demonstrates how much responsibility Hester has taken on, and how completely she has isolated both she and her daughter from Arthur Dimmesdale. Pearl sees herself as being entirely a product of her mother, and therefore is a lesson only for her mother.

Truth 4: Pearl approaches Dimmesdale, after he argues against taking her from her mother, and presses his hand against her cheek. Time and time again, Pearl seeks out Dimmesdale's affection, trying to pull him into admitting his fatherhood.

Truth 5: Pearl notices Chillingworth and Dimmesdale staring at her and her mother from a high window. She tells her mother that Chillingworth is a "Black Man...[who] hath got hold of the minister already," and that she must look away to protect herself.

Truth 6: Mistress Hibbens encourages Dimmesdale to meet her in the forest one night so that Dimmesdale can meet the Black Man, like she says he is trying to do. Mistress Hibbens recognizes that Dimmesdale is doing battle with the devil - in the form of the sin he has committed.

Truth 7: When thinking about Dimmesdale's opposite public and private reactions to her and Hester, Pearl calls Dimmesdale "a strange, sad man."

Truth 8: Mistress Hibbens notices Dimmesdale's changed appearance before the Election Sermon and comments on how different he looked - almost like a different man - when Hester and he met secretly in the forest.

Truth 9: Dimmesdale's speech, heard from far away, sounds like a shriek.

Truth 10: Pearl cries over Dimmesdale as he lies dying on the scaffold, and finishes her time as a bringer of torment.



Topic Tracking: Wild

Wild 1: Chillingworth mentions that he has learned many valuable things during his stay in the woods with the Indians.

Wild 2: Governor Bellingham's highly cultivated English Garden cannot survive in the wilds of the New World.

Wild 3: When Hester calls on Governor Bellingham to plead for keeping her daughter, Pearl screams wildly, disobeying her mother's command that she behave appropriately.

Wild 4: Governor Bellingham and his entourage describe Pearl as looking like a wild bird in the red and gold dress Hester has made for her.

Wild 5: Chillingworth observes that Dimmesdale has a strong animal aspect to his personality.

Wild 6: The meteor, a recognized and closely followed wild phenomenon, flashes an "A" across the sky.

Wild 7: Chillingworth gathers wild herbs for his remedies.

Wild 8: While playing, Pearl hits a bird with a stone, then stops suddenly when she hurts it, saddened that she has hurt something as wild as she.

Wild 9: Pearl returns from playing in the forest decked out in all sorts of wildflowers and greenery.

Wild 10: Hester feels estranged from Pearl as Pearl runs through the forest, entirely at home. When Pearl runs to greet her mother and Dimmesdale in the forest, she stops short on the far side of a little brook, too wild to enter the area where Hester and Dimmesdale are sitting. Dimmesdale worries out loud "that thou canst never meet thy Pearl again."



Introductory

The Custom House begins with a description of the physical building, located in Salem, Massachusetts, which is old and weather-beaten on the outside. The Custom House serves as the border checkpoint and clearinghouse for all ships entering the U.S. in Salem. The Narrator, which the footnotes lead us to believe is Nathaniel Hawthorne himself, describes his impressions of the Custom House officers and inspectors, who are largely retired ship captains and men who have their positions by virtue of birth. Before getting into this description, however, the Narrator tells us that his ancestors have lived in Salem for hundreds of years, and that they have taken a large role in law enforcement since they arrived.

Topic Tracking: Law 1

The men of the Custom House are lazy and very relaxed: they have repetitious conversations about their experiences at sea and tell old jokes. They sit leaning against the wall, their chairs tipped back, staring straight ahead of them as they speak to one another.

In addition, these men seem to fear the newly arrived Narrator. The Narrator continues with a description of the permanent Inspector, who is almost exclusively absorbed with the contents of his meals, past and present. "Here, in a word, - and it is a rare instance in my life, - I had met with a person thoroughly adapted to the situation which he held." Introductory, pg. 24.

Topic Tracking: Law 2

After a lengthy examination of the characters above, the Narrator begins to describe the unused second floor of the Custom House, which houses long-forgotten records and papers. Inside a particular bundle of papers, he finds the private writings of Jonathan Pue, a Custom House surveyor who died suddenly many years ago. Included in this bundle is an object that grabs the Narrator's interest:

"But the object that most drew my attention, in the mysterious package, was a certain affair of fine red cloth, much worn and faded....It had been wrought, as was easy to perceive, with wonderful skill of needlework....This rag of scarlet cloth,- for time and wear and a sacrilegious moth had reduced it to little other than a rag,- on careful examination, assumed the shape of a letter. It was the capital letter A. By an accurate measurement, each limb proved to be precisely three inches and a quarter in length. It had been intended, there could be no doubt, as an ornamental article of dress; but how it was to be worn, or what rank, honor, and dignity, in by-past times, were signified by it, was a riddle which...I saw little hope of solving." Introductory, pg. 30.

The implications of this mystery cloth are quickly revealed when the Narrator presses it against his chest:



"I happened to place it on my breast. It seemed to me then, that I experienced a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of a burning heat; and as if the letter were not of red cloth, but red-hot iron. I shuddered, and involuntarily let it fall upon the floor." Introductory, pg. 31.

Topic Tracking: Burning 1

This object is the Scarlet Letter, bound around a complete record of the story of the Letter and its wearer. The Narrator took it upon himself to write a dramatic account of the story he found in these papers. While writing, the Narrator encountered a number of difficulties. It was good fortune when he was forced out of the Custom House due to political changes in the government--this free time allowed him the leisure and frame of mind to complete the story, which comprises the rest of the novel.



Chapter 1

A prison door is surrounded by a group of Puritan settlers. They are dressed in dark, simple clothing, and wear serious expressions. Just to the side of the door is a single wild rose bush, covered with flowers because it is June, rose season:

"[O]n one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him." Chapter 1, pg. 46.

Topic Tracking: Red 1

Topic Tracking: Law 3

Chapter 2

The townspeople talk about the prison's captive, a woman named Hester Prynne, who is being held for the crime of adultery. She leaves the prison with her three-month old daughter (the proof of her sin), Pearl, and proceeds through a throng of whispering people to the town scaffolds, where she will stand for the entire morning, until an hour past meridian.

Topic Tracking: Law 4

Topic Tracking: Law 5

She is not put in the stocks, but rather holds her daughter and stands alone for all to see. Being marked a sinner and displayed before the town is part of her punishment.

Topic Tracking: Law 6

The townspeople get a first glimpse of the Scarlet Letter, 'A' for Adultery, which Hester will be forced to wear from that day forward. The townspeople are both impressed by the skill of the embroidery and shocked by its beauty.

"On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony." Chapter 2, pg. 50.

The Scarlet Letter is in sharp contrast to the traditional clothing of the Puritan settlers. During this ordeal, Hester recounts in her head memories of life before she left England for the colonies - her father, her deceased mother, and a scholar with a deformed shoulder - the left one slightly higher than the right, a man later identified as Roger Chillingworth. It appears that this man was her husband.

Topic Tracking: Law 7

Topic Tracking: Red 2



Chapter 3

Still on display in the Town Square, Hester notices, at the edge of the crowd, a man with one shoulder higher than the other standing with a Native-American. "When he found the eyes of Hester Prynne fastened on his own, and saw that she appeared to recognize him, he slowly and calmly raised his finger, made a gesture with it in the air, and laid it on his lips." Chapter 3, pg. 57.

The man, who later identifies himself as Roger Chillingworth, then approaches a townsman to ask what crime Hester has committed. The man explains to Chillingworth that Hester is guilty of Adultery, but, although the sentence for such a crime is death, she has not been condemned to such a harsh sentence.

There are two main reasons for this. First of all, she refuses to identify the man with whom she committed this crime. Secondly, she came to this country alone, leaving her much-respected husband to study in Amsterdam, and nothing has been heard of him since. Many assume that he drowned on his voyage across the Atlantic. This assumption, along with the knowledge that she is good-looking, and was therefore more susceptible to this type of sin, caused the magistrates to give her a light sentence. Chillingworth, without revealing his identity in any way, comments that the decision not to kill Hester was a wise one. He also repeats, three times, "he will be known." Chapter 3, pg. 59, indicating that he intends to uncover the secret of the man who committed this crime with Hester. Meanwhile, Hester does not take her eyes from Chillingworth, whom she is glad she first encounters among a crowd. She thinks to herself that she would be afraid to meet him alone.

The day continues with Governor Bellingham, the governor of the Massachusetts Colony during this period, speaking to Hester from a high balcony overlooking the town square. He begins by gesturing to a pale young man who is sitting beside him. The young man is Hester's preacher, Reverend Dimmesdale. He asks Reverend Dimmesdale to make Hester tell the crowd who her partner in this crime was. After a pause, Dimmesdale rises and makes an impassioned speech begging Hester to name her partner. At the end of the speech, which is very dramatic and moving, Hester's daughter reaches her arms towards the preacher and murmurs in response to his speech. The Reverend Wilson, another local clergy man, asks Hester to name the man as well, and therefore be allowed to take the Scarlet Letter off her breast. Still, Hester refuses to name him "'Never!' Replied Hester Prynne, looking not at Mr. Wilson, but into the deep and troubled eyes of the younger clergyman [Dimmesdale]. 'It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine!'" Chapter 3, pg. 64.

At the appointed time, Hester returns to her jail cell. Some townspeople who watch her enter the darkness of the jail claim that the Scarlet Letter glows in the dark.

Topic Tracking: Burning 2

Topic Tracking: Truth 1



Chapter 4

That evening in the jail cell, Hester is in a nervous and hyper state. Her daughter is screaming as well. Master Brackett, the jailer, is worried about the health of his inmates, and decides to bring a physician to see them. Roger Chillingworth, who had arrived earlier in the day, had nowhere to stay that night, and so had been housed in the jail. He had introduced himself as a physician by trade, and mentioned that he had learned a number of valuable treatments from the Indians, in addition to his European training. Brackett brings Chillingworth to Hester's jail cell, and then leaves them alone. Chillingworth examines the baby, mixes a medicinal drink, and hands it to Hester, so that she may feed the baby. Chillingworth refuses to feed the baby because he is not the father. Hester fears that Chillingworth is intending to kill the child, but he reassures her that he is not. After drinking the medicine, Pearl quiets down immediately.

Topic Tracking: Wild 1



Chapter 5

Hester is released from prison. She prepares to enter the world and maintain a strength that was hard to find while on the town scaffold--now she must remain strong in the face of the townspeople's open hostility. Hester recognizes that, with her scarlet letter, she will be a public and open example of sin for many people. The Narrator entertains the question of why Hester chose to remain in Boston and accept her punishment, rather than escape, with Pearl, to Europe, where she could live anonymously, and not have to wear the Scarlet Letter:

"But there is a fatality, a feeling so irresistible and inevitable that it has the force of doom, which almost invariably compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghostlike, the spot where some great and marked event has given the color to their lifetime; and still the more irresistibly, the darker the tinge that saddens it." Chapter 5, pg. 73.

Also, the Narrator considers the idea that Hester may remain there because she feels tied in a silent bond to the man with whom she committed the sin of adultery. Hester remains in Boston, and goes to live on a remote peninsula of the town in an abandoned cottage where the land is too sterile to support a family. Hester's only skill is that of needlework and embroidery. This is the manner in which she supports herself and her daughter. Although Puritan dress is typically very simple and has very little decoration, there are certain events that call for elaborate embroidery and decoration. Ordinations, installations of public officers, clothing the dead and newborns all were events which called for Hester's services - the most important life cycle events in the colony. "But it is not recorded that, in a single instance, her skill was called in aid to embroider the white veil which was to cover the pure blushes of a bride." Chapter 5, pg. 76.

Hester spends very little of the money she makes on herself, but sews very beautiful, fancy, imaginative and bright dresses for her daughter. She also gives much of her left over money to people in more need than herself. But because of the Scarlet Letter, she does not receive any thanks. She is constantly held as an example to the people, and preachers often stop in the street to give impromptu sermons to a gathering crowd about her sin. She will often enter church, only to find that the sermon is about her. This isolation in the middle of a bustling town, allows Hester, she imagines, to see the sin that other people hide. She feels she can detect a certain blush, or sympathetic reaction to the sight of the Scarlet Letter that betrays guilt. The Letter was indeed a suitable punishment--it seemed to the townspeople to burn with an internal fire which glowed in the nighttime.

Topic Tracking: Burning 3



Chapter 6

Pearl is a very beautiful little girl, named after a jewel of great price. She is agile and looks perfect, however, her temperament leaves a lot to be desired.

"Throughout all, however, there was a trait of passion, a certain depth of hue....The child could not be made amenable to rules....The mother's impassioned state had been the medium through which were transmitted to the unborn infant the rays of its moral life; and, however white and clear originally, they had taken the deep stains of crimson and gold, the fiery lustre, the black shadow, and the untempered light of the intervening substance. Above all, the warfare of Hester's spirit, at that epoch, was perpetuated in Pearl." Chapter 6, pg. 83.

Hester tries to discipline her in a gentle way, much different than the Puritan standard of harsh punishment, but it does not work. Hester finds Pearl all the more difficult because Pearl cannot play with other children.

Hester wishes that Pearl could have a relatively normal childhood, but Pearl was born an outcast, and the other children treat her that way. The most difficult thing Hester has to deal with in relation to Pearl is Pearl's attachment to the Scarlet Letter. As an infant, the first thing Pearl reaches for is the letter, and her fascination with the embroidered square of cloth continues throughout her childhood. One day, Hester playfully suggests to Pearl that she is not Hester's child. Hester asks her if she came from the Heavenly Father. Pearl says no, and instead asks Hester to tell her where she did come from. Hester never gives Pearl an answer.

Topic Tracking: Truth 2



Chapter 7

Hester pays a visit to Governor Bellingham's house to deliver a pair of embroidered gloves. In addition, Hester makes this trip in the hopes that she can speak to Governor Bellingham about Pearl. There has been some talk in Boston about taking Pearl away from Hester, for fear that Hester is not educating her properly, and subjecting her to bad influences because of her crime. Pearl comes with Hester, wearing a bright red dress with gold embroidery that Hester has made. It is made of the same materials and in the same colors as the Scarlet Letter. "There was a fire in her [Pearl] and throughout her; she seemed the unpremeditated offshoot of a passionate moment." Chapter 7, pg. 93.

Topic Tracking: Burning 4

The sun is shining, and Pearl asks Hester if she may strip it off the house and gather it for herself. "'No, my little Pearl!' said her mother. 'Thou must gather thine own sunshine. I have none to give thee!'" Chapter 7, pg. 95. Hester and Pearl wait for Governor Bellingham, who approaches from the garden with the Reverend Wilson, the Reverend Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth.

Topic Tracking: Wild 2

Topic Tracking: Wild 3



Chapter 8

The meeting between these two groups of people becomes tense. The four men see Pearl first, and ask her who she is. "'I am my mother's child,' answered the scarlet vision, 'and my name is Pearl!'" Chapter 8, pg. 101. They call her "Ruby," "Coral," and "Red Rose" instead.

Topic Tracking: Red 3

Topic Tracking: Truth 3

Topic Tracking: Wild 4

Governor Bellingham tells Hester that the magistrates think Pearl would be better served if she were taken from Hester, put in darker, less outrageous clothes, and given daily religious lessons. Hester replies by saying that the Scarlet Letter has taught her many valuable lessons that she can, and will, pass on to her daughter. Governor Bellingham asks Pearl who made her, and where she comes from. Although Pearl has been given lessons in religion and the Bible by her mother, Pearl refuses to answer correctly. "After putting her finger in her mouth, with many ungracious refusals to answer good Mr. Wilson's questions, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door." Chapter 8, pg. 103. Roger Chillingworth smiles at this response, and Hester notices at this moment that his facial features have changed - his face looks darker and more misshapen than before.

Governor Bellingham concludes from Pearl's answer that she must be taken from Hester. Hester responds violently to this suggestion, and, in her fury, turns suddenly to the Reverend Dimmesdale, who was her pastor. "'Speak thou for me!' cried she. 'Thou wast my pastor, and hadst charge of my soul, and knowest me better than these men can. I will not lose the child! Speak for me! Thou knowest, - for thou hast sympathies which these men lack! - thou knowest what is in my heart, and what are a mother's rights, and how much the stronger they are, when that mother has but her child and the scarlet letter! Look thou to it! I will not lose the child! Look to it!'" Chapter 8, pg. 104.

Dimmesdale responds with a solid argument for Hester to keep Pearl, saying that Pearl is as much a curse - a constant reminder - as she is a blessing. Pearl responds to this argument by approaching Dimmesdale, taking his hand, and pressing it against her cheek in an uncharacteristically gentle way.

Topic Tracking: Truth 4

As she leaves Governor Bellingham's house, Hester is stopped by Mistress Hibbins, Bellingham's sister, who, a few years later, is executed as a witch. Mistress Hibbins invites Hester to join the "Black Man" in the forest that night, but Hester declines, saying that, with Pearl, she cannot do any such thing, even if she might want to.



Chapter 9

Roger Chillingworth is the subject of Chapter Nine, entitled "The Leech." He develops a serious friendship with the Reverend Dimmesdale, who is very weak, pale and sick-looking. Chillingworth begins to act as Dimmesdale's doctor, and eventually the congregation, at Chillingworth's suggestion, decides that the two must live together, so that Chillingworth can keep a close eye on Dimmesdale's health. They move into a widow's house, and each take half of the first floor for their apartment.

"Roger Chillingworth - the man of skill, the kind and friendly physician - strove to go deep into his patient's bosom, delving among his principles, prying into his recollections, and probing everything with a cautious touch, like a treasure-seeker in a dark cavern. Few secrets can escape an investigator, who has opportunity and license to undertake such a quest, and skill to follow it up. A man burdened with a secret should especially avoid the intimacy of his physician." Chapter 9, pg. 114.

Chillingworth senses a secret animal side to Dimmesdale and wishes to reveal it.

Topic Tracking: Wild 5



Chapter 10

Chillingworth remains very suspicious of Dimmesdale. He pursues many careful but insistent conversations, trying to find a way to get Dimmesdale to confess to his sin, but also making very sure that he does not let Dimmesdale suspect that Chillingworth is trying to do anything of the sort. Chillingworth senses a secret animal side in Dimmesdale and wishes to reveal it. Dimmesdale, unfortunately, cannot recognize what Chillingworth is doing: "Trusting no man as his friend, he could not recognize his enemy when the latter actually appeared." Chapter 10, pg. 120.

Topic Tracking: Wild 5

One day Chillingworth returns from a walk to gather herbs and plants with a dark, wilted leaf. Dimmesdale asks him where he found it. "'Even in the graveyard here at hand....They are new to me. I found them growing on a grave, which bore no tombstone, nor other memorial of the dead man, save these ugly weeds, that have taken upon themselves to keep him in remembrance. They grew out of his heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him, and which he had done better to confess during his lifetime.' 'Perchance,' said Mr. Dimmesdale, 'he earnestly desired it, but could not.'" Chapter 10, pg. 120.

During this conversation, Pearl and Hester approach the cemetery, which Chillingworth's apartment overlooks. Pearl collects burrs from the side of a grave and sticks them to Hester's Scarlet Letter. She also throws one at Dimmesdale, who is looking at the two women from a second floor window. This gesture causes Hester to look up as well, and the four people are caught all staring at each other. Pearl breaks the silence by saying, "Come away, mother! Come away, or yonder old Black Man will catch you! He hath got hold of the minister already. Come away, mother, or he will catch you! But he cannot catch little Pearl!" Chapter 10, pg. 123.

Topic Tracking: Law 8

Topic Tracking: Truth 5

After Pearl and Hester leave, Chillingworth again tries, this time more directly, to get Dimmesdale to tell him what ails him. Dimmesdale refuses, saying, "But, if it be the soul's disease, then do I commit myself to the one Physician of the soul!...But who are thou, that meddlest in this matter? - that dares thrust himself between the sufferer and his God?" Chapter 10, pp. 125-6. Dimmesdale runs from the room, and the two men do not speak for days.

A few days later, Chillingworth finds Dimmesdale fast asleep in a chair at midday. Chillingworth jumps at this chance to examine Dimmesdale, something he has not been given permission to do at any other time. Chillingworth gently lifts Dimmesdale's shirt, and takes an extended look at the minister's chest, then turns away. "But with what a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror! With what a ghastly rapture...making itself even riotously manifest by the extravagant gesture with which he threw up his arms towards



the ceiling, and stamped his foot upon the floor! Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom." Chapter 10, pg. 127. Chillingworth sees a deep scar that Dimmesdale has carved into his own chest.



Chapter 11

Chillingworth's discovery changes the way he thinks about his relationship to Dimmesdale. He now has a plan, and "a quiet depth of malice, hitherto latent, but active now...which led him to imagine a more intimate revenge than any mortal had ever wreaked upon an enemy." Chapter 11, pg. 128. Dimmesdale senses that there is a dark force operating around him to make him feel worse, but he cannot tell from where it is coming. Despite the fact that Dimmesdale finds Chillingworth disgusting, ugly and unsettling in his physical appearance, he maintains close ties with Chillingworth without realizing that he may be the source of the evil. Despite all this worrying, and possibly even because of it, Dimmesdale becomes very popular among his congregation, who refuse to consider that Dimmesdale, when he calls himself a sinner, might be telling the truth, as opposed to trying to set a holy example. In private, Dimmesdale uses a whip to inflict the bloody wound on his chest that never heals.

Topic Tracking: Red 4

In addition, Dimmesdale fasts for days at a time, testing his endurance by using this traditional Puritan form of penance. During these long fasts he stays up at night, and begins to hallucinate. He often sees Hester Prynne and Pearl walking towards him, as Pearl points first to Hester's Scarlet Letter and then to Arthur Dimmesdale's bloody chest. "To the untrue man, the whole universe is false,- it is impalpable,- it shrinks to nothing within his grasp....The only truth that continued to give Mr. Dimmesdale a real existence on this earth was the anguish in his inmost soul" Chapter 11, pg. 134. One of these nights, he is seized with an idea. He dresses carefully for public worship and steps quietly outside.



Chapter 12

Dimmesdale makes his way to the town scaffold where Hester and Pearl had stood many years previous as a part of Hester's sentence. He climbs the stairs so he is standing where they stood. Because it is a very dark night, and no one is awake, Arthur Dimmesdale feels no fear of being discovered. However, there was one eye that was able to see him - the all-knowing one that was calling to him from the depths.

Because he is in such a state of guilt and repentance, Dimmesdale lets out a loud shriek, which echoes through the quiet, sleeping town. He is suddenly convinced that everyone will awake when they hear the sound. There is no reaction, except for two lights, one in Governor Bellingham's window, and one coming from his sister Mistress Hibbins' window. After these lights are extinguished, Dimmesdale sees a man, who turns out to be the Reverend Wilson, with a lantern approaching the scaffolds. Although the lantern casts a gleam, it does not reach the scaffold, and Dimmesdale remains undetected. Reverend Wilson had come from the bedside of Governor Winthrop, the first Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who had just passed away. As Reverend Wilson passes, Dimmesdale imagines that he speaks to him, as if the two men were passing in the street during the day and engaged in normal pleasantries.

Dimmesdale imagines a very real conversation with Reverend Wilson, but then watches Wilson continue past the scaffolds, not glancing up from his path. Dimmesdale remains standing on the scaffold, suddenly realizing that, because of the chilly night air, he may not be able to walk down the steps of the scaffold until morning, when he is discovered. At this thought, Dimmesdale begins to laugh, and promptly hears a child's laugh in return. He recognizes Pearl's voice, and calls after her and her mother. Hester has also been at Governor Winthrop's deathbed, taking measurements for his burial gown, and she had her daughter with her. Mr. Dimmesdale calls to the two women, saying "Come up hither, Hester, thou and little Pearl. Ye have both been here before, but I was not with you. Come up hither once again, and we will stand all three together!" Chapter 12, pg. 140.

Dimmesdale takes Pearl's hand, which sends a new rush of energy through the minister's body. As they stand on the scaffold, Pearl asks Dimmesdale if he will stand with the two of them like this tomorrow at noon. He says no, but that one day he will indeed stand there with the two of them. He then goes on to say that Judgment Day will be when they stand together, but never in this world will they do so. Pearl responds with a laugh. At that moment, a meteor streaks across the sky, throwing a red streak across the sky that lights up the whole town square. Pearl, with her characteristic naughty, witchcraft-like expression, withdraws her hand from Arthur Dimmesdale's and points across the street. The meteor's trail, to which Dimmesdale directs his gaze, has taken the shape of a big, red 'A' streaking across the sky.

Topic Tracking: Red 5

Topic Tracking: Wild 6



However, Pearl was not pointing at the meteor's streak but at Roger Chillingworth, who was also returning from Governor Winthrop's deathbed, and who is now gazing, with a terrible and malevolent expression, at the three people standing on the scaffold. Dimmesdale reacts with terror at the sight of Chillingworth, and asks Hester if she knows the man. Hester, true to her oath to Chillingworth, does not reveal her relationship to Chillingworth. Pearl whispers to Dimmesdale that she knows who he is, but then simply speaks in gibberish. She does this, she says, because Dimmesdale refused earlier to stand with she and Hester on the scaffold during the day. Chillingworth convinces Dimmesdale to come home with him, so that he is able to preach the next day at Sunday morning services.

The sermon the next morning is the best the Reverend Dimmesdale has ever given, and many souls are brought to the truth because of it. As Reverend Dimmesdale leaves his pulpit, the sexton meets him, holding out one of Dimmesdale's black gloves, which was found on the scaffold that morning. "Satan dropped it there, I take it, intending a scurrilous jest against your reverence. But, indeed, he was blind and foolish, as he ever and always is. A pure hand needs no glove to cover it!" Chapter 12, pg. 145. The sexton then mentions the meteor shower in the shape of an 'A' that was seen the night before, and says "...which we interpret to stand for Angel. For as our good Governor Winthrop was made an angel this past night, it was doubtless held fit that there should be some notice thereof." Dimmesdale indicates that he has not heard about the occurrence. Chapter 12, pg. 145.



Chapter 13

Again we take a look at Hester, examining who she has become over the past seven years. After the incident on the town scaffolds at night, Hester Prynne realizes how badly Mr. Dimmesdale has deteriorated, both physically and emotionally, since Pearl was born. She decides to seek Mr. Dimmesdale out in private and try to offer her help. She recognizes her bond with him because of the crime they committed together, and therefore her responsibility to him. In addition, Hester continually helps those who less fortunate than she, and Arthur Dimmesdale is no exception.

In addition, Hester finds that the perception of her in the community has begun to change: "[M]any people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength." Chapter 13, pg. 148. However, Hester cannot find it in herself to accept any thanks, instead pointing silently to the scarlet letter when she is stopped in the street.

However, it does not appear that the community continues to fully recognize the meaning of the scarlet letter. The first thing townspeople tell strangers about the letter when they inquire is that Hester is kind and giving. Only afterward do they explain its original significance. In addition, a mythology has risen out of the letter, and people say that it has protected Hester from mortal wounds from an Indian arrow, and that it will keep her safe no matter with whom she associates. Despite this favorable change in how Hester is perceived among the townspeople, Hester herself has undergone a deeper, more profound change. "All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up by this red-hot brand, and had long ago fallen away, leaving a bare and harsh outline, which might have been repulsive, had she possessed friends or companions to be repelled by it." Chapter 13, pp. 149-50.

Topic Tracking: Burning 5

She even looks harsh, with her plain dresses and hair tucked completely under a cap, never to be seen by anyone. "[T]here seemed to be no longer anything in Hester's face for Love to dwell upon" Chapter 13, pg. 150. It is debatable whether or not she can regain those attributes. Because Hester is in this position, her life enters a period of deep and continuous thought. It is in this realm that Hester commits the deepest crimes against the Puritan fathers, who are not accepting, as are the Europeans, of freedom of thought. Hester takes great theoretical risks and dramatic steps, like those of the European rulers who have overthrown ancient prejudicial systems.

She begins to imagine the possibility of upsetting the power of men, and therefore giving women a better place in the world. In imagining change, she sees that the power of men has become so ingrained it almost appears hereditary, and she understands how difficult it will be to create change. Of course, "It is remarkable that persons who speculate the most boldly often conform with the most perfect quietude to the external regulations of society." Chapter 13, pg. 151. Hester lives her life in this careful manner because of Pearl, for whom she must care, and about whom she must think all the time.



Pearl is so difficult, as if she is affected by her parents unlawful union, that she serves as both a warning and a topic of contemplation for Hester. Hester sees the great injustice done to women throughout history, and wonders whether Pearl should not be sent to Heaven immediately, because the world was too horrible, and because then Hester could leave the world as well.

Hester begins, after her encounter with Dimmesdale, to contemplate the issue of Arthur Dimmesdale's imminent psychological ruin at the hands of Roger Chillingworth. She had always felt that, by refusing to implicate him in the crime of adultery, she was saving him from the ruin that she faced every day. Unfortunately only now does she realize her mistake - this silent, hidden enemy (Chillingworth) is much worse than any public shame. She recognizes, however, that Chillingworth has stooped even lower than she by trying to get revenge on Dimmesdale - something she has never done. Hester decides that she must speak to Chillingworth, her former husband, and try to convince him to let Dimmesdale be.



Chapter 14

Hester encounters Chillingworth by the shore a few days later, gathering weeds with which to make medicines. She tells Pearl to leave her and play by the water's edge while she approaches Chillingworth.

Topic Tracking: Wild 7

Before anything else, he tells Hester that the town magistrates were recently debating whether or not to let Hester remove the Scarlet Letter. Hester replies: "It lies not in the pleasure of the magistrates to take off this badge....Were I worthy to be quit of it, it would fall away of its own nature, or be transformed into something that should speak a different purport." Chapter 14, pg. 155.

As Chillingworth speaks to her, Hester notices a deep and harsh burning in Chillingworth's eyes. Hester realizes that Chillingworth has become a devil, and she stares at the flame in his eyes, all the while feeling the burning of the scarlet letter on her chest. The two are the same.

Topic Tracking: Burning 6

Topic Tracking: Red 6

She is glad to change the subject to Dimmesdale, about whom Chillingworth is excited to speak, because Hester is his one and only confidant. However, Hester states that she is sorry she ever made a vow of secrecy with Chillingworth, because it made things so much worse for Dimmesdale. Chillingworth claims that he has kept the man alive with his medicine, but Hester replies by saying that death would have been far more welcome and a less harsh punishment to Dimmesdale. Chillingworth gets very excited defending the punishment he has exacted from Dimmesdale, and stops suddenly, realizing how fiend-like he has become. "'I have already told thee what I am! Fiend! Who made me so?' 'It was myself!' cried Hester, shuddering. 'It was I, not less than he. Why has thou not avenged thyself on me?' 'I have left thee to the scarlet letter,' replied Roger Chillingworth. 'If that have not avenged me, I can do no more!' He laid his finger on it, with a smile. 'It has avenged thee!' answered Hester Prynne." Chapter 14, pg. 158.



Chapter 15

Hester thinks about Chillingworth after they part from their meeting. She recognizes a deep hatred she has developed for the man, and is shocked that she ever tricked herself into thinking she loved him. Images of their marriage give her chills.

Hester then summons Pearl back from her play at the water's edge. Pearl returns, having decorated herself with seaweed, including a bright green "A" laid out on her chest.

Topic Tracking: Red 7

Topic Tracking: Wild 8

When Hester asks Pearl if she knows what the meaning of the symbol is, Pearl responds: "'Truly do I!' Answered Pearl, looking brightly into her mother's face. 'It is for the same reason that the minister keeps his hand over his heart!'" Chapter 15, pg. 166. But, that is all she can say, and Hester refuses to explain any further, despite the fact that Pearl continues to press the subject. Finally, the next morning, Hester yells at Pearl and threatens her if Pearl continues to ask about the letter. Hester tells her she wears the 'A' for the sake of its gold embroidery.

Chapter 16

Hester finally meets with Mr. Dimmesdale in the woods to reveal the secret identity of Chillingworth to him. She plans to meet him as he returns from a visit to a local Indian village. As she and Pearl walk deeper into the woods, the sun continues to dart away ahead of them:

"'Mother,' said little Pearl, 'the sunshine does not love you. It runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on your bosom. Now see! There it is, playing a good way off. Stand you here, and let me run and catch it. I am but a child. It will not flee from me, for I wear nothing on my bosom yet!' 'Nor ever will, my child, I hope,' said Hester. 'And why not, mother?' asked Pearl, stopping short, just at the beginning of her race. 'Will not it come of its own accord, when I am a woman grown?' 'Run away, child,' answered her mother, 'and catch the sunshine! It will soon be gone.'" Chapter 16, pg. 168.

Pearl then asks Hester about the Black Man, to whom people come at night in the forest and sign their names in blood in his big book.

"'But mother, tell me now! Is there such a Black Man? And didst thou ever meet him? And is this his mark?'....'Once in my life I met the Black Man!' said her mother. 'This scarlet letter is his mark!'" Chapter 16, pg. 170.

At last Hester sees Dimmesdale approaching and tells Pearl to go off to play. She runs to a nearby babbling brook that Pearl remarked earlier is telling a very sorrowful story, and she tries to sing along with a happier story. Hester approaches the minister and notices how, in him, "Death was too definite an object to be wished for or avoided." Chapter 16, pg. 173.



Chapter 17

Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale meet and speak in the forest. First, they question each other's bodily existence, and slowly retreat away from the forest path, out of sight. Dimmesdale speaks about the lie that is his life, as Hester tries to comfort and reassure him. He does say, "Thou little knowest what a relief it is, after the torment of a seven years' cheat, to look into an eye that recognizes me for what I am!" Chapter 17, pg. 176.

Hester decides to take a big step, and tells Arthur who Roger Chillingworth really is, to explain why Dimmesdale has felt that there was evil lurking around him:

"I might have known it," murmured he. 'I did know it!' Was not the secret told me, in the natural recoil of my heart, at the first sight of him, and as often as I have seen him? Why did I not understand? O Hester Prynne, thou little, little knowest all the horror of this thing! And the shame! - the indelicacy! - the horrible ugliness of this exposure of a sick and guilty heart to the very eye that would gloat over it! Woman, woman, thou art accountable for this! I cannot forgive thee!" Chapter 17, pg. 178.

Hester begs for forgiveness, and throws herself into a tight embrace with Arthur. After a long silence, Arthur does forgive her. He says that they aren't the worst sinners in the world; Roger Chillingworth is worse than either of them. Hester and Dimmesdale then realize they must leave Chillingworth, as well as the whole settlement of Boston behind. Hester convinces Dimmesdale that he must change his name and leave with her and Pearl for a new life in Europe.



Chapter 18

An incredible weight has been lifted from Hester's shoulders by her and Dimmesdale's decision to leave the colony. Hester unpins the scarlet letter from her dress and throws it aside. It lands very near to the brook. She then uncovers her hair and lets it fall over her shoulders. "There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheek, that had been long so pale." Chapter 18, pg. 185.

Topic Tracking: Red 8

Hester then calls Pearl back from her play in the forest, where she had decked herself in all sorts of flowers and greenery. Pearl approaches slowly at the sight of Arthur Dimmesdale.

Topic Tracking: Wild 9



Chapter 19

Hester begins to recite all of Pearl's wonderful qualities. Pearl approaches Hester and Arthur, but stops at the far edge of the brook. It is almost as if Pearl is unable to return to Hester from the wild of the forest. "'I have a strange fancy,' observed the sensitive minister, 'that this brook is the boundary between two worlds, and that thou canst never meet thy Pearl again.'" Chapter 19, pg. 191.

Topic Tracking: Wild 10

Pearl begins pointing wildly at her mother's breast and shrieking. Hester realizes that Pearl misses the scarlet letter, which Hester has always worn in Pearl's presence. Hester picks up the letter from the near side of the brook and pins it in back on her dress, at which point Pearl runs across the brook to Hester and hugs her tightly. Hester asks Pearl to come meet Arthur Dimmesdale, to which Pearl asks if he will walk with them into town. Hester says no. Dimmesdale gives Pearl a kiss on her forehead. Pearl promptly runs to the brook to wash it off, and stays standing apart from the two adults as they finish conversing and planning.



Chapter 20

As Dimmesdale leaves Hester and Pearl in the forest, he has to look back to assure himself that his encounter with the two had been real. To further reassure himself of the reality, he thinks through the plans he and Hester have made. Hester will secure passage and secrecy for the three on a Spanish pirate ship that is in port and set to leave in four days. Dimmesdale is pleased with this plan because his Election Sermon, given on the opening day of the legislature, is set for the day before the boat's departure. "At least, they shall say of me," thought this exemplary man, "that I leave no public duty unperformed, nor ill performed!" Chapter 20, pg. 197.

With his meeting with Hester behind him, Dimmesdale finds a new reserve of energy which follows him through encounters with some of his parishioners. First, Dimmesdale meets the deacon, and they converse about the communion supper.

Dimmesdale passes others in his parish, and struggles similarly. Lastly, he encounters Mistress Hibbins. She notices that the Reverend has been to the forest, and encourages him to go with her next time.

Topic Tracking: Truth 6

After this encounter, Dimmesdale reaches his apartment, and goes inside quickly, glad to be alone. As he peruses his desk, complete with his half-written Election Sermon, Chillingworth knocks on the door. Dimmesdale refuses Chillingworth's ensuing offer of a physician's treatment today, and "The physician knew then, that, in the minister's regard, he was no longer a trusted friend, but his bitterest enemy." Chapter 20, pg. 204. After Chillingworth leaves, without saying any of his thoughts aloud, the reverend eats a large meal, throws his half-written Election Day sermon away, and starts a new one. He spends the entire night writing an inspired, lengthy sermon.



Chapter 21

It is the morning of the Election Sermon, as the townspeople begin to gather in the town square--among them, Hester and Pearl. Hester's face is an almost deathlike pale mask.

Topic Tracking: Red 9

Pearl wonders about the reason for the holiday and Hester explains that everyone is here to see the procession pass to the Church. Pearl asks if the minister will be there, and Hester says he will.

"What a strange, sad man is he!" said the child, as if speaking partly to herself. 'In the dark night-time he calls us to him, and holds thy hand and mine, as when we stood with him on the scaffold yonder. And in the deep forest, where only the old trees can hear, and the strip of sky see it, he talks with thee, sitting on a heap of moss! And he kisses my forehead, too, so that the little brook would hardly wash it off! But here, in the sunny day, and among all the people, he knows us not; nor must we know him! A strange, sad man is he, with his hand always over his heart!'" Chapter 21, pg. 209.

Topic Tracking: Truth 7

Hester directs Pearl's attention to the festivities. The Puritan election is somewhat more than a simple election, it is also a dignified celebration of a new political year for the young Puritan government. Everyone in town comes out to celebrate the election.

Topic Tracking: Law 9

Included in the crowd are a number of sailors from the Spanish boat currently in Port. The commander of the boat is seen speaking privately with Chillingworth. The commander then approaches Hester, who is standing alone, and informs her that Chillingworth has requested passage on the boat along with Hester, Pearl and Dimmesdale.



Chapter 22

The Procession passes through the town square. The Reverend Dimmesdale is part of the procession, and is remarkable today in his appearance: "There was no feebleness of step, as at other times; his frame was not bent; nor did his hand rest ominously upon his heart. Yet, if the clergyman were rightly viewed, his strength seemed not of the body....so abstracted was his look, it might be questioned whether Mr. Dimmesdale even heard the music [of the procession]." Chapter 22, pp. 217-218. Hester sees Dimmesdale's changed appearance and feels as if he is totally lost to her - as if their encounter in the woods had been only a dream. "'Mother,' said she, 'was that the same minister that kissed me by the brook?'" Chapter 22, pg. 219.

Against the public norm, Mistress Hibbins begins speaking to Hester in public, whispering to her in the midst of festivities. She hints and jokes that Dimmesdale's current good health is due to a meeting he and Hester had in the forest.

Topic Tracking: Truth 8

As Hibbins and Hester speak, Dimmesdale begins his speech inside the over-crowded Church.

Topic Tracking: Law 10

Hester cannot get in because of the crowds, so she stands beside the familiar town scaffold. She can hear only the indistinct sound of the sermon, because she is too far away to hear the words. She listens intently, sympathizing "so intimately that the sermon had throughout a meaning for her, entirely apart from its indistinguishable words." Chapter 22, pg. 221.

Topic Tracking: Truth 9

As the sermon continues, those still outside, many from far settlements, begin to crowd around Hester, many seeing the famed scarlet letter for the first time. "At the final hour, when she was so soon to fling aside the burning letter, it had strangely become the center of more remark and excitement, and was thus made to sear her breast more painfully than at any time since the first day she put it on." Chapter 22, pg. 225.

Topic Tracking: Burning 7



Chapter 23

Dimmesdale's sermon ends, and the crowd inside the church speaks in rapture about the sermon. Yet, as Dimmesdale leaves the church, the people take on a subdued tone: "The glow, which they had just before beheld burning on his cheek, was extinguished, like a flame that sinks down hopelessly among the late-decaying embers. It seemed hardly the face of a man alive, with such a deathlike hue; it was hardly a man with life in him that tottered on his path so nervelessly, yet tottered, and did not fall!" Chapter 23, pg. 228.

Topic Tracking: Burning 8

The Reverend Wilson, worried about Dimmesdale's health, walks toward him to offer help, but Dimmesdale refuses. He walks on slowly until he reaches the scaffold, where Hester is standing with Pearl by her side. Dimmesdale stops, turns toward them, and reaches out his hands. Hester approaches slowly, but pauses just before she reaches him. At that moment, Chillingworth pushes through the crowd to Dimmesdale and tries to stop him. "'Ha, tempter! Methinks thou art too late!' answered the minister, encountering his eye, fearfully, but firmly. 'Thy power is not what it was! With God's help, I shall escape thee now!'" Chapter 23, pg. 230.

The minister turns again to Hester, saying this must be the best way to resolve the whole tragedy. He says he is dying and wants to confess his sin. He stands up on the scaffold, onto which Hester and Pearl help him climb, and confesses to his congregants. At the end, he opens his shirt to reveal his chest. Chillingworth, who is looking on in horror, reacts: "'Thou hast escaped me!' he repeated more than once....'May God forgive thee!' said the minister. 'Thou, too, hast deeply sinned!'" Chapter 23, pp. 232-233. Dimmesdale then turns to Pearl and asks her to kiss him.

"Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled." Chapter 23, pg. 233.

Topic Tracking: Truth 10

Dimmesdale then says farewell to Hester, and she bends over him, wanting to know if they will meet again. "Hush, Hester, hush!...The law was broke! - the sin here so awfully revealed! - let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear! It may be that, when we forgot our God, - when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul, - it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion." Chapter 23, pg. 233. Dimmesdale then dies.

Topic Tracking: Law 11



Chapter 24

After the excitement, the townspeople have differing ideas of how what they saw on Arthur Dimmesdale's chest came to be. They saw the scarlet letter "imprinted in the flesh." Some thought Dimmesdale had inflicted the torture upon himself, some felt that Roger Chillingworth had caused it to appear with the aid of his magic and herbs. Still others felt "that the awful symbol was the effect of the ever-active tooth of remorse, gnawing from the inmost heart outwardly, and at last manifesting Heaven's dreadful judgment by the visible presence of the letter." Chapter 24, pg. 234. Finally, a few spectators continue to claim that they saw nothing at all, and that the minister had said nothing to imply his guilt in any way. Instead, they say he turned to Hester, "a fallen woman", to emphasize the unattainable nature of human righteousness.

After the townspeople's responses, Roger Chillingworth is described. His entire demeanor changes after Dimmesdale's death. His vitality is gone, because the subject of his revenge - and life's work - is dead. Roger Chillingworth dies within the year, and bequeaths a large amount of property in Europe to Pearl Prynne. Soon after Chillingworth's death, Pearl and Hester disappear. Years later, Hester returns alone to the preserved cottage on the peninsula. She receives lavish gifts and letters with armorial seals from far-away places, possibly from a lover. No one knows for sure where Pearl has gone, though Hester is seen sewing an opulent baby's gown definitely not meant for a Puritan household.

Hester becomes a valued counselor to many women. "Hester comforted and counseled them as best she might. She assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness." Chapter 24, pg. 239. Hester dies many, many years later, and "a new grave was delved, near an old and sunken one, in that burial-ground beside which King's Chapel has since been built. It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tombstone served for both." Chapter 24, pg. 239.

The tombstone reads: "On a Field, Sable, the Letter A, Gules." Chapter 24, pg. 240. Sable is black, Gules is the traditional name for red in heraldry.