

Nathaniel Hawthorne The Scarlet Letter

Literature



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The Scarlet Letter

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" is a novel with a powerful symbolism of the human divergence between emotion and intellect. The story, set in the Puritan town of Boston, intertwines gothic romance and allegory. The major motifs are resentment, desire, nature of evil, sin, death and emotions.

The scarlet is a badge of humiliation that signifies an adulterer. Although Hester wears the scarlet, no one physically confines her to stay in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The society uses the scarlet letter to symbolize shame, but instead Hester uses it to signify her identity. She moves from a position of shame to a position of importance and status. Although it is a physical reminder of sin, it is largely insignificant. This symbolizes the confines and regulations that society places on individuals without any significant meaning.

Identity and society is a central theme in the novel. Hester desires to have her own identity, and not have the society shape her behavior. She has the chance to run away to another colony and remove the scarlet, but she chooses to stay at home with the scarlet. In fact, she is dismayed when she learns that the elders consider removing the scarlet. She sees removing the scarlet as a sign of acceptance of society's dominance over her character. She keeps the scarlet on as it symbolizes her sin, which is part of her identity.

In chapter 12, a meteor traces out an "A" in the night sky in the presence of Dimmesdale, Hester and Pearl. Dimmesdale sees this as an implication that he should also wear a scarlet like Hester. It is quite unfortunate that the society sees a woman as an adulterer, as if she committed the crime alone.

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Even so, Puritans interpret symbols differently, as some see the A as a symbol of 'Angel'.

Work Cited

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Dartmouth College, 2011.