

The Scarlet Letter

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Edited by
Harry Levin



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Nathaniel Hawthorne

THE
SCARLET LETTER

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

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Nathaniel Hawthorne: 1804-1864

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Introduction

HARRY LEVIN

WE SPEAK of a book as a classic when it has gained a place for itself in our culture, and has consequently become a part of our educational experience. But the term conveys further meanings implying precision of style, formality of structure, and, above all, concern for the basic principles that animate and regulate human behavior. Evaluated by these criteria, the list of unquestioned American classics is not a lengthy one. Often, with oblique regard for the alphabet, it is headed by *The Scarlet Letter*. This, among Hawthorne's larger works, has been generally rated as his characteristic best. It was also his first book-length narration — if we follow his own judgment in ignoring *Fanshawe*, an unsuccessful effort which went back to his college days. For some dozen years after graduation, he had retired to his mother's house in Salem, where he experimented with essayistic sketches and didactic tales, most of them evoking the regional past. A series of penny-a-lining assignments for Boston publishers, a brief job as measurer at the port of Boston, a season as a member of the utopian settlement at Brook Farm had not tempered that sense of isolation which underlay his need to communicate. Then his happy marriage and his paradisiac sojourn at Concord had released those flights of fantasy which reached their haven in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. But, since such writing was too delicate to support a growing family, his influential friends secured him part-time employment as Surveyor of the Revenue in the United States Custom-House at Salem.

Wedlock had made him belatedly sympathetic toward women and the relation between the sexes. Office-holding made him somewhat ironic about himself and his fellow office-holders and even the society they served. Given the austerity of his background plus the reticence of his temperament, both of these responsibilities had been steps to a hard-won maturity in his mid-forties, for Hawthorne as a man and

as a writer. He admired the intellectuals of Concord and Cambridge, but he had seen enough of them to realize that his own mind would never march with any school of thought. After association with Bronson Alcott and Transcendentalism at its most impractical, he had welcomed "a change of diet." Yet he felt he must account to readers for his three-and-a-half years in an ineffectual bureaucracy, as well as for the circumstances that led to the termination of his appointment. His "autobiographical impulse," which came to the surface whenever he introduced a new work, joined forces with his homing instinct, which tended to focus his imagination on houses of varying kinds. Hence he gave his *Scarlet Letter* a local habitation by way of his introduction, "The Custom-House." Now that the Whigs had come back into office and Hawthorne — a staunch, if not an ardent, Democrat — was out of it, he could resume his true calling, the life of letters. But first he settled his score with politics, said farewell to his native town, and reverted to the colonial period, by gathering his latest impressions into a "sketch of official life."

That introductory sketch, which is one-fifth as long as the actual story, seems to have caused more immediate discussion than what it heralded. It may well have helped to create the unexpected demand for second and third editions within a few months. To the second edition Hawthorne added a preface, disclaiming partisan or personal malice, and refusing to delete or alter a single touch. It would not have become him to wax indignant over the Spoils System, from which he would benefit in his turn; instead, with cool amusement and obvious relief, he had set down a few reminiscences of his erstwhile colleagues. More serious is the objection some critics have leveled at "The Custom-House": that it offers an unsuitable preamble to *The Scarlet Letter* itself. There is indeed a contrast; but it has clearly been calculated; for Hawthorne's art is based on antithesis. It is as if, before conducting us into a realm of shadows, he wished to exhibit worldly substance at its most substantial. Yet the commercial routine of customs inspection harbors internal contrasts of its own. The names of Salem merchants, as entered in ledgers along with their respective imports and tariffs, are balanced against the shades of ancestral Hawthornes, witch-hanging Puritans who would frown upon

their scion's weakness for writing story-books. The declining seaport is presented as the ghost of its bustling former self. A passing glance at the Gold Rush reminds us that, by 1849, the pursuit of material wealth had worked its way from New England to California.

But Hawthorne cannot give us more than "a faint representation of a mode of life not heretofore described." Contemplating the page that reality has spread out directly before him, he regrets his inability to probe its commonplaces for deeper significance. "A better book than I shall ever write," he sighs, "was there" — there, in that sphere of concrete observation which others were developing into the modern novel. He never thought of himself as a novelist; he was habitually "a romance-writer." The romance, as he defined it repeatedly, takes place in a twilit half-world "where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet." Hawthorne contrasts his busy days at the custom-house with his dreamy evenings at home in the parlor, where his imaginative faculties reawaken amid the flicker of moonlight and firelight. The evolving shapes, though they seem strange and remote, are the familiar spirits that haunt his fiction: snow-images, soap-bubbles, mirror-reflections. But though he proceeds — through his domestic transition — from the contemporary and realistic to the legendary and symbolic, the shift of direction is not a means of escape. Rather, the quasi-historical setting allows him to question certain moralistic assumptions with a freedom and a candor which he could not have applied to a nineteenth-century subject. It is not the least of the book's achievements that, in the very epoch of genteel femininity, when America outdid Victorian England in the strictness of its taboos, Hawthorne's treatment of a triangle was hardly less of a challenge than D. H. Lawrence's.

As a customs officer, Hawthorne could cite such poetic forerunners as Chaucer and Burns, and could set an American precedent for the later Melville and Edwin Arlington Robinson. Moreover, as a keeper of records, he could shift to the story-teller's ground by employing a conventional device of romantic fiction; he could imagine that he had chanced upon his material in an ancient manuscript, which he described in meticulous detail, together with its faded and tattered yet gorgeous relic, the letter. This lent an air of authenticity to

the tale, while enabling the narrator to assume a tone of editorial aloofness. It had the more potent effect of fixing attention upon the searing initial, promising mystery and inviting speculation from the very outset. Hawthorne's plan for the volume had been to include a number of shorter pieces; he mentions two of his neighborhood rambles, "Main Street" and "A Rill from the Town Pump." Many of his earlier stories had touched upon themes that *The Scarlet Letter* would spell out: notably "The Maypole of Merry Mount," where bright color and its studied avoidance emphasized the antagonism between Cavalier and Puritan views of sex. Frequently he used costume for characterization, as in "Lady Eleanore's Mantle," where a sumptuous garment symbolizes the pride of its owner and carries within it the germs of catastrophe. He was interested in characters who were not only isolated but marked by all too literal stigmata, such as the heroine of "The Birthmark," whose imperfection cannot be eradicated because it betokens Eve's original sin.

In "Endicott and the Red Cross," as the title specifies, the central object was a different sort of scarlet emblem. But, among the Salem crowd that has gathered to see the Popish sign renounced, we are given a memorable glimpse of an anonymous bystander:

There was likewise a young woman, with no mean share of beauty, whose doom it was to wear the letter A on the breast of her gown, in the eyes of all the world and her own children. And even her own children knew what that initial signified. Sporting with her infamy, the lost and desperate creature had embroidered the fatal token in scarlet cloth, with golden thread and the nicest art of needle-work; so that the capital A might have been thought to mean Admirable, or any thing rather than Adulteress.

Hawthorne was fascinated by that stern practice of branding convicted sinners, which he had encountered in his antiquarian reading. He refined upon it with a paradox, when he permitted the unnamed hussy to make a decoration out of her insignia of dishonor. Yet there was no real ambiguity; she was simply brazening out her shame; even her children knew what A stood

for, embellished or otherwise. A jotted hint from a notebook of 1844, seven years after that fable, records Hawthorne's determination to study more deeply the character of such a protagonist. Persistently, he realized his intention three years later, when he undertook *The Scarlet Letter*. He was aware that the abbreviated epithet could not do justice to the full-scale portrait he was drawing, that moral judgments are not satisfactorily arrived at by the external application of labels. The perennial conflict of letter and spirit had been sharpened for him by the tension between the repressive legalism of Calvinistic tradition, on the one hand, and the Transcendental urge toward self-expression, on the other. If his starting-point is condemnation, his objective is to reopen the case. His heroine's illegitimate child, precocious though she may be, does not accept or understand the stigma. And, along with her, we are kept wondering: "What does the letter mean, mother? — and why dost thou wear it? — and why does the minister keep his hand over his heart?"

The girl has a special affinity with the letter; for, if it is the mark of her mother's sin, she herself is the outcome and retribution. She, as her observers recognize, is "the scarlet letter endowed with life." As such she stands a little outside of the code that governs the others; like the infant Quaker in Hawthorne's "Gentle Boy," she is cruelly mistreated by the other children. Not being gentle, she retaliates fiercely, and acquires a reputation as an imp of evil, perhaps the devil's offspring. She is more appropriately depicted in the guise of an elfin sprite, a natural child in the fullest sense of the phrase, happiest when gracefully playing in her element, nature. Innocent enough to have been named Pearl, which signifies purity as well as great price, nonetheless she is wilder than an Indian, as wild as a bird or a breeze. She has learned her capitals in a hornbook; but, though Hawthorne alludes to the *New England Primer*, she has not mastered its most elementary lesson, where A stands for the archetypal sinner:

By *Adam's* fall
We sinned all.

Her innocence does not exempt her from the inherited evils of the flesh; but it does suggest that, as at the Garden of Eden,

fatal temptations sometimes produce fertile consequences. Hawthorne was not attempting to subvert the Seventh Commandment or to demonstrate that adulteresses are admirable. He was concerned to show that fundamental morality is not so much a series of rigorous laws to be enforced by a meddling community as it is an insight to be attained through continuous exertion on the part of the individual conscience. Viewed in that light, it becomes conceivable for the adulteress to outgrow her discredited role and to grow into so admirable a person as Hester Prynne.

This kind of growth would be inconceivable if Hawthorne really were what he has so frequently been taken for, a mere allegorist. Hester could then do no more than live up to her label, like Bunyan's personified vices. But that is precisely where Hawthorne broke through the preconceptions of allegory to living situations. Though he was fond of pointing out object lessons or utilizing symbolic counterparts to embody his ideas, those ideas — when charged with feeling — transcend or transfigure their embodiments. The letter, which seems naïvely and narrowly explicit at first, gradually takes on its unique aura of intellectual suggestions and emotional associations. It is "a forcible type of moral solitude," for worse or for better: a curse which ostracizes its wearer, and yet — as the outcast develops morally — a blessing in disguise. Whereas Lady Eleanore wrapped herself in the mantle of pride, Hester wears the badge of humility. Like "the cross on a nun's bosom," it has a quality of sacredness; and Indian weapons seem powerless to transpierce it. More and more, it proves to be a talisman, though some of the hearsay about it seems open to doubt — its capacity to burn and glow and to project itself against the sky. At that level, we cannot solve the enigma, which slips away into the void like Melville's whale. However, we can reconsider the ethical standards whereby Hester has been judged and condemned. Her ambiguous A comes to mean, among other things, angel. Her shameful token is finally visualized, in heraldic terms, as a noble escutcheon upon her tombstone.

The book ends, as it begins, in retrospect, so that the characters are framed by the symbolism. In the interim, Hawthorne brings them to life by reinforcing their very resistance

to the categories imposed upon them or to the types with which they are compared. Hester may represent, to the grim elders and their self-righteous goodwives "the general symbol at which the preacher and moralist might point, and in which they might vivify and embody their images of woman's frailty and sinful passion." But, from her entrance, she transforms her disgrace into dignity. Her beauty, at odds with her spiritual condition, "made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped." Her taste for the beautiful, which has prompted her to embroider the letter, is one of the attributes that set her apart. The dash of red against her gray attire is a constant reminder of the differences between herself and the other colonists, whose somber dress proclaims their cheerless outlook. Moving from the prison to the pillory, she is forced to stand there in the statuesque pose of the Woman Taken in Adultery. Yet a Catholic witness, Hawthorne suggests, might — with esthetic justification — have likened her to a more profoundly appealing prototype: a painting of the Madonna. The Child in her arms is thus, from one point of view, the confounding evidence of her guilt. From another, it is the innocent hope of future redemption. Like the letter by which it is prefigured, it concretely links profane with sacred love; it is the unbreakable bond between the sin and its expiation.

In his European romance, *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne was to elaborate his conception of education by sin, of remorse as the teacher that broadens the sympathies and of suffering as the discipline that deepens the emotions. Similarly, Hester finds that her trespass endows her with "a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts." Her ostracism gives her a vocation. Outlawed by the law-abiding, she is welcome only where misery prevails. Her good deeds and selfless interventions make her a byword among her fellow sufferers, and she rehabilitates herself as a Sister of Charity. Meanwhile, the letter has served as "her passport into regions where other women dared not tread." Liberating her from the conventions she has violated, it has encouraged her to think more freely and to form independent notions of right and wrong. Cut off from the Puritans, she approaches more closely than they to the speculative and skeptical spirit of the age, as expressed by

more enlightened thinkers on the other side of the Atlantic. Had she been less of a woman and a mother, Hawthorne surmises, she might have become a prophetess like Anne Hutchinson; but her godly neighbors were even harder on their heretics than on their profligates. The alternative was the illicit path to the forest and to a witches' sabbath. Mistress Hibbins, who beckons Hester thither, is predestined to be hanged for witchcraft; yet she insinuates — what Hawthorne illustrates in "Young Goodman Brown" — that many of the town's respectable citizens, with impunity, devote their nights to the clandestine worship of the devil.

Hawthorne would have us remember that his settlers were not far from their English origins. They were the near descendants of the Elizabethans; and, though they could not have inherited the rich fancies of their forbears, something of the older lore and custom had weathered their harsher climate. Hawthorne's nomenclature catches, at least, the seventeenth-century atmosphere. Hester is an Anglicized variant of Esther, the name of the queen who redeemed her people in the Old Testament. William Prynne was one of the most fanatical of the English Puritan controversialists. His surname has more pertinently belonged to Hester's husband, who — after making his appearance incognito — adopts the pseudonym of Roger Chillingworth. Here cross-reference is less pertinent; for William Chillingworth was a pioneering exponent of religious toleration; but Hawthorne seems to be playing upon the reverberations of "chilling." Two years afterward, in *The Blithedale Romance*, he would christen his cold-blooded villain Hollingsworth — an echo paralleled by the chiming names of the two hesitant heroes, Dimmesdale and Coverdale. As for Chillingworth, he is the most complete incarnation of a figure which Hawthorne was continually re-examining. This was the man of intellect whose obsession had deadened his sensibilities, the scholar-scientist whose experiments dealt ruthlessly with human lives. Shortly before *The Scarlet Letter*, he had been adumbrated in "Ethan Brand," but without convincing motivation for his fiendish curiosity. In 1847 Hawthorne had noted: "A story of the effects of revenge, diabolizing him who indulges in it."

Our first impression of Chillingworth is a dim one, a face in

a sequence of pictures out of her past which flash through Hester's mind at the pillory. Within a page or two, she identifies him as the stranger at the edge of the crowd; and he indicates, by a silent gesture, that the recognition is mutual. For him it is coupled with the shock of discovering how unfaithful she has been in his absence; and she, when he interviews her in prison, refuses to betray the identity of her lover. Up to this point, the moral superiority is on the side of the injured party, Chillingworth. He is bookish, elderly, slightly deformed, and entirely incompatible with a young wife, as he now is ready to admit. Leaving her fate to the auspices of the letter, he resolves to take the vengeance against his rival into his own hands. Step by step, he spies out his victim, tortures an already agonized conscience, and goads it on toward confession; and, in the process, Chillingworth himself is transformed into a virtual fiend. He is fatalistic about the parts that all three must enact: "It has all been a dark necessity." Chance or necessity operates to make Arthur Dimmesdale his fellow lodger and patient, since the young minister is in waning health, and since the scholar's scientific interests qualify him as a physician. His equivocal standing, in juxtaposition with the minister's pious repute, inspires the congregation to believe that their saintly champion is struggling against a diabolical agent. The ironic fact, of course, is that Chillingworth has been mortally wronged by Dimmesdale.

If Chillingworth plays Mephistopheles, he is not trying to beguile Faust into a seduction but to bring out his remorseful afterthoughts. As a doctor, Chillingworth perceives that the source of his patient's malady is not physical. There is "a strange sympathy betwixt soul and body" in Dimmesdale. Ultimately his body reveals the secret his soul has kept. Today we would call his illness psychosomatic, and look upon his colloquies with the leech as sessions with a psychoanalyst. Hawthorne's vocabulary may sound old-fashioned; yet we have scarcely penetrated beyond some of his psychological perceptions, such as his argument for the essential sameness of love and hate — which we might characterize, less elegantly, as the ambivalence of Chillingworth's motives. With Dimmesdale, the problem is Hawthorne's obsessive theme of secret sin — guilt-consciousness, suppressed and seeking catharsis.

He first appears as a model of virtue, praying and exhorting the adulteress to disclose the adulterer, lest her unknown partner "add hypocrisy to sin." That the parson refers to himself is an irony which may pass unnoted, until the scalpel of Chillingworth's suspicion has laid bare "the interior of a heart." Then, in a "vain show of expiation," Dimmesdale goes through the motions of Hester's exposure. Alone, in the darkness, he ascends the scaffold. His night-watch is a Hawthornesque meditation, not unlike the critical chapter on "Governor Pyncheon" in *The House of the Seven Gables*. The vision in which it culminates, the letter A etched in red against the heavens, is either supernatural or subjective — Hawthorne deliberately equivocates.

Dimmesdale has undergone penance, but he has not achieved penitence; he has suffered, he has not been absolved. While "the outcast woman" is becoming a lay saint, he — "poor, fallen man" — is being overwhelmed by his unacknowledged sinfulness. Brilliant, sensitive, esteemed for his learning at Oxford and for his eloquence in the colonies, he is weak where she is strong. While she has emancipated herself, he is still entrammeled between his vows and his desires. An encounter in the woods between "the pastor and his parishioner," as Hawthorne dryly designates them, threatens to rekindle their latent passion. "What we did," Hester tells Dimmesdale, "had a consecration of its own." Nature, being heathen, sympathizes with this renewal; but Pearl remains, significantly, an antipathetic force; and the letter figures as a portent, momentarily flung into the brook and inexorably cast up again. The adulterous couple, like Dante's Paolo and Francesca, seem bound together by the very ties they have broken. They plan an elopement, a return to the Old World, unaware that the omniscient Chillingworth will be making his own plans to accompany them. In the meantime, on the day before they are scheduled to sail, the Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale has been accorded the duty and the honor of preaching an Election Sermon. It is that moment of triumphant pride which precedes a tragic fall. Hawthorne leads up to it by tracing Dimmesdale's inner vacillations and conflicting emotions, and by setting the outer stage for a closing scene which releases the pent-up dramatic suspense.

Hawthorne's art is related to the drama less immediately than to the pulpit. It is the product of a cultural environment dominated by the ministry, where a work of fiction — if tolerated at all — had to be an *exemplum*, an anecdotal example illustrating an ethical precept. Typical was Hawthorne's parable of the black veil put on by a blameless minister in order to remind his congregation of their undisclosed sins. This is the opposite of Dimmesdale's concealment, which is exemplified when he compulsively puts his hand over his heart. The scarlet letter is even more overt than the black veil, and Hester's sentence is intended to convert her into "a living sermon against sin." But living, as it is practiced by the preacher, does not square with his sermonizing. His preliminary exhortation rings hollow; his solitary vigil on the scaffold is an evasion. Though the Election Sermon, his valediction, stirs its hearers to enthusiastic acclaim, Hester hears only its sorrow-laden undertone. The key modulates from theology to psychology, as it usually does with Hawthorne. At the close of the story, as at the beginning, the chorus of townspeople is seen and heard, placing the situation in social perspective. The holiday, the festive procession, the modest relaxations from "Puritanic gloom" highlight the desperate seriousness of the spokesman for the occasion. His speech is not so much precept as example: he re-ascends the scaffold, bares his breast, and exposes the brand. To be at peace with himself, like Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, he must publicly confess.

Unlike Dostoevsky's hero-villain, Dimmesdale has already suffered his punishment, and he willingly yields up his life with his guilty burden. Characteristically, his final action is surrounded with metaphysical uncertainties, leaving readers a choice of interpretations. Thus, if they do not believe in heavenly miracles or in Chillingworth's devilish magic, the emergence of the letter may be rationalized as the result of Dimmesdale's self-laceration. We are even informed of "highly respectable witnesses" who have denied the phenomenon, together with any carnal relationship between the clergyman and the fallen woman, and have interpreted his death in her arms as an exemplary act of Christian humility. But Hawthorne pointedly discounts that version. Among the numerous morals that might be drawn, he stresses chastity or virtuous

conduct less than sincerity and willingness to acknowledge one's faults: "Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!" Truth is the extenuating virtue to which Hester Prynne has held fast, despite her transgression. Unfaithful as a wife, she has not been "false to the symbol on her bosom." Whereas the priest has not only polluted his cloth, but — by playing the hypocrite — has degraded his virtues into vices, and must pay heavily for his atonement. Each of the pair is appropriately punished for having broken the sacrament of marriage. Yet neither is as much to blame as Chillingworth, their victim who has become their accomplice and persecutor. "That old man's revenge," says Dimmesdale to Hester, "has been blacker than my sin."

It has been destructive and self-destroying, whereas their union — though unhallowed — has been unselfish and has become creative. This transposition of values is underscored when Pearl, their visible tie, confuses Chillingworth with the devil, alias the Black Man. Pearl herself is a "living hieroglyphic," especially meaningful when bedecked with wild-flowers. She claims to have come into existence by being plucked from the rosebush that so symbolically flowers among the weeds at the prison-door. Once she fills in her mother's ornament with prickly burrs; again she outlines a green A upon her own dress in eel-grass. Hawthorne's belief in correspondences between the natural and the spiritual worlds is manifest in all his descriptions of foliage. The doctor picks his mysterious herbs in the graveyard, where they hint unspoken crimes to Dimmesdale. Whatever the idea, it is rendered concrete by the image. Conversely, the imagery is emblematic, and always pictures forth — as Hawthorne would say — some concept or other. His descriptive mode is what he elsewhere calls "the moral picturesque." Many of his short stories read like essays, where the moralist discourses about a pictorial illustration. His method of building up a longer narrative is to articulate a chain of such episodes, under captions which are indications of *dramatis personae*, scenic effects, or stage-directions. Each episode dramatically centers on what we might regard as a *tableau vivant*, a group of figures posed in revealing attitudes, summed up in an aphoristic re-

mark by one of them or the implicit comment of some telling detail.

Hawthorne's flair for symmetry controls his neat arrangement of chapters, as well as the balanced prose of his sentences. Apart from its prologue, *The Scarlet Letter* consists of twenty-four numbered sections, which can be coherently grouped in twos, threes, fours, and sixes, as readers may notice. The conclusion rounds out a pattern established by the opening scene, with Hester, then Dimmesdale, in the pillory. Both of those scenes are public occasions; the latter has had its private rehearsal at the midpoint, Chapter XII, "The Minister's Vigil." All three — plus Chapter VII, "The Governor's Hall" — may be considered as ceremonials, bringing the major characters into the choric presence of the community. These alternate with more intimate revelations, monologues where consciences are examined in Hawthornesque solitude, or dialogues where they confront one another with searching interviews: Hester-Chillingworth, Chillingworth-Dimmesdale, Dimmesdale-Hester. This trio of principal actors, the parties to the conjugal involvement, augmented by its elusive consequence, Pearl, forms a cast succinctly completed by a few minor characters modeled on historic originals: Richard Bellingham, governor of the colony; John Wilson, senior pastor at Boston; and Mistress Hibbins, alleged to be a witch. The story moves along with the rhythm of a detective thriller, quickening as its network of suspicion tightens and is confirmed. Hester and Chillingworth recognize each other at the commencement; Chillingworth recognizes Dimmesdale by the middle of the book; and Dimmesdale, Chillingworth midway through the second half.

The culmination is the recognition-scene where Dimmesdale lays his soul bare to the multitude. As he dies, the purport of the letter becomes a matter of common knowledge. Yet it is more significant for the self-knowledge it has been imparting to those involved with it during the seven probationary years since the beginning, when Pearl was some three months old. Hester, unable to set it aside or to stay away for long, will return to live and die in its service, as we learn from a glancing epilogue. Chillingworth, wilting "like an uprooted weed," will die within a year, bequeathing his considerable fortune to

Pearl. Her future, as a young American heiress abroad, may provoke our curiosity; but that is another story, it has been suggested, which might be better left to Henry James. The time-span of *The Scarlet Letter* can be dated by Pearl's infancy: roughly, she is a child in arms for the first four chapters, three years old in Chapters V-VIII, and seven by Chapter XII. These dates can be grounded historically through the allusion to John Winthrop's death — actually March 26, 1649 — on the night of the minister's vigil. Twelve more chapters, constituting the second half, culminate about two months afterward on Election Day. This does not make the tale a historical novel; in spite of Hawthorne's documentary touches, he is preoccupied with morals, not manners; and his title-page announces "a romance." A romance about Puritanism is bound to be somewhat contradictory; but here the contradiction is logically resolved through the interplay between puritanical constraints and romantic impulses, between the rigid observances of the market-place and the tangled passions of the forest.

More broadly speaking, these alternatives dramatize such typically American dilemmas as those of introspection against extroversion, nonconformity against standardization, and skeptical detachment against material progress. What is distinctive with Hawthorne is his emphasis on the more difficult choice. Ordinarily it seems easier for our authors to depict characters — for example, John Steinbeck's — rough in outward aspect but pure in heart. Hawthorne's portraiture is more refined; yet it catches traits of anguish and terror which, though they may never be completely eliminated, are blandly masked by the smiling surfaces that a later breed of Americans seems to prefer. We are told that the Election Sermon projected a glorious vision of our national destiny; yet the repercussions we feel are neither hopes nor promises; they are the agonies of Arthur Dimmesdale. Sin and death are not absent from Utopia, Hawthorne asserts upon his very first page. He did not enjoy his pessimism; he would have preferred to write sunnier books. The few rays of sunlight that shine in *The Scarlet Letter* are associated, through the image of Pearl, with his affection for his own daughter. But his gloomy ancestors maintain the upper hand; and when he speaks of combining recreation with solemnity, his metaphor is an honorific version