

# The Rosa Multiflora Blooming in the Hell

## Brief Introduction of *the Scarlet Letter* Written by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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**Abstract**—*The Scarlet Letter* is a representative work of the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, describing the “purifying” process of characters. The opened “gate of hell” is a place to imprison bodies and souls, but also a place to save souls and find back human nature. Those hypocritical veils finally couldn’t cover the truest aspect of the human nature, like rosa multiflora fully blooming. This paper, surrounding “*the scarlet letter A*”, analyzed the characters in the work.

**Keywords**—*the scarlet letter A; Hawthorne; the human nature*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Nathaniel Hawthorne is the most influential romantic writer in 19 Century, America. His representative work *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850, immediately created a sensation after the publication, which established the important position of Hawthorne in American Literature field. *The Scarlet Letter* incisively and vividly shows the ideology and the artistic style of Hawthorne, and the most successful part of it is that the work gave the characters implied meanings and showed the conflict between sense and sensibility. Readers can not only see Hawthorne’s sarcasm and criticism on the real society, but also feel his profound understanding of human psychology and their psychology in troubles.

### II. THE SCARLET LETTER “A”

The scarlet letter “A” is the mainline of the whole work, a typical symbol. In the work, scarlet represents the pure love of Hester and Dimmesdale. Their love was based on the normal family and the social life, but under the control of Puritanism. The so-called truth was usually covered by the veil of fallacy; the human nature was distorted; the scarlet that represents pure love was regarded as a shame. Scarlet also represents the lust of the human nature. Hester and Dimmesdale were both young people with lust. Regardless of the constraint of the religion and traditional thoughts, they were indulged in the lust. For the couple, they did enjoy the sweetness of love, while for Puritans, both of them were sinners of the God, a woman losing her virginity and a priest neglecting his duty. Scarlet is also the symbol of death by burning. Hester and Dimmesdale was in love with each other indeed, but their love was not accepted by others; in that society, they were supposed to be punished by burning to death and their souls would suffer from the torture

of “hellfire”.

“A” is the first letter in the alphabet, symbolizing a new start. A start, according to the doctrine of Christianity, means degenerating. In the work, at first, the letter “A” was also labeled by “adulterer”, implying a kind of contradiction itself. Meanwhile, “A” is the initial letter of French word “amour” and “Arthur Dimmesdale”, and also indicates the “affection” in Hester’s heart, which is to say “A” implies the beautiful and pure love. The “A” carefully embroidered by Hester looked incredibly beautiful, so “A” also has a meaning of “art” and “able”. At last, Hester won trust and respect by her own perseverance. Thus, “A” has one more meaning --- “angel”. Throughout the whole work, Hester experienced the process from betrayal to guilt, guilt to awaking, awaking to mature. She constantly and bravely confronted the control of Puritanism from the beginning to the end. Therefore, the letter “A” has an indicating meaning of the tenacious and tough female warrior “Amazon” [1].

### III. ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS IN *THE SCARLET LETTER*

#### A. *Hester Prynne, Kind and Brave*

The Hester created by Hawthorne’s writing is a kind, brave, young and beautiful woman who dared to take responsibilities. She was punished and condemned due to her crime of adultery; she was sentenced to wearing the shameful scarlet letter “A” on her chest and should be humiliated in front of the public[2]. It finely sounds like that Puritans punished and humiliated the ignorant woman who committed the crime of adultery. At that time, the scarlet letter “A” indicates guilt and punishment, kindness and ugliness. No matter what she hid in front of her chest, the pain was always there, deep in her heart. However, the love of Hester for Dimmesdale was never changed except death. She rather chose to undertake all the pain and punishment to protect her lover. Deep down inside her heart, she thought the scarlet letter “A” symbolized the beautiful love of her and Dimmesdale. It was the letter “A” that gave Hester the courage and energy to face any punishment and humiliation without mentioning Dimmesdale. The scarlet letter “A” is like a flaming fire in Hester’s heart, to warm her, encourage her and bring her hope.

In addition, the shining scarlet letter “A” is the symbol of Hester’s guilt. The scarlet letter “A” on her chest equals to the label of “slut”, reminding her of the crime of adultery at every

Fund: this paper is the phased objective of the social sciences fund in Jilin Province; Project Number: 2016B335.

moment. That made her fully experienced the torture and torment of “hellfire”, which got her guilty soul clean and purified gradually. In the work, Hester was labeled by the scarlet letter “A” and suffered from torture, humiliation and torment, but she didn’t give herself up for that. On the contrary, she chose to do good works and help others. Finally, her regretless giving paid off, and she won back the respect and good feelings of people. At that moment, the scarlet letter “A” was no longer the excuse for people to laugh at or humiliate her. It was no longer the stigma of her crime, but the symbol of a respectable, kind and capable person.

This is the Hester Prynne created by Hawthorne; kind and brave, she had her own perseverance and human nature; she won back respect and approval by her own actions.

#### *B. Dimmesdale, Cowardly and Hypocritical*

Compared to Hester, the Dimmesdale in Hawthorne’s writing is coward and hypocritical. Dimmesdale, as a Puritan, was supposed to keep faith in his belief heart and soul, but he couldn’t resist the temptation of love and lust. At last, he secretly ate the “forbidden fruit”. He enjoyed the joy and warmth with Hester. Meanwhile, he couldn’t put the “mission” given by the God aside. He couldn’t throw away that “holy-light veil”. From the beginning to the end, Dimmesdale was in the contradiction and torture of the love and the God. He hated hypocrisy and cowardice, but he didn’t have the courage to confess his guilt; he was deeply in love with Hester, but he couldn’t find a way to help Hester get rid of the accusation of her crime. Thus, Dimmesdale had double identities, both “angel” and “devil”. It is the double identities that caused the separation of his body and mind, as well as mental disorder[3]. After Dimmesdale was accused of committing the crime and was punished, he never had a peaceful and stable day to live. He always woke up from nightmares at midnights, and usually exposed the most real aspect inside his heart by sleepwalking.

The life of Dimmesdale can be summarized by “the light in darkness --- the hypocrisy in the light”. Every day, he suffered from double tortures of soul and body. Because he didn’t dare to confess his guilt and couldn’t save Hester, he could only see Hester punished, humiliated and tortured. Finally, he was mentally depressed every day, and had no light in his heart. The so-called religion in his heart was like a bloody knout, whipping his soul and body and keeping him away from the bright and peaceful life. In the end, he couldn’t take the torture and confessed his crime. He died in his confession and atonement, and the religious spirit he was proud of was destroyed with his death.

#### *C. Chillingworth, Evil and Distorting*

Chillingworth in this work symbolizes evil and distortion. Chillingworth was old with a sullen personality and a disabled body. He married Hester not for the sake of love. He just wanted Hester to be his wife to warm his lonely and desolate heart and have the sense of home again. At the very start, it was not fair for Hester, because he couldn’t give the love Hester wanted. Then, Chillingworth was missing. During that period, Hester found her true love. When he came back and knew everything about that, he bitterly hated Hester’s betrayal.

He thought Hester destroyed his home, and fell in the endless loneliness and dreariness again.

To find the accomplice and revenge, Chillingworth let the devil in his heart drive and control himself. He pretended as a doctor and a friend to follow Dimmesdale every moment; he seized every chance and used every way to spy upon the secret in Dimmesdale’s heart, torturing Dimmesdale’s soul; he also tried every means to stop Dimmesdale’s confession, to make Dimmesdale live in compunction and torture. Therefore, Chillingworth is the devil, and the crime he committed is truly unforgivable. However, at last, when he confronted Pearl, he not only helped to cure her wound, but also left his heritage to her. That action of Chillingworth is worth reader’s thinking, and also leaves a large space of imagination for readers. Why Chillingworth did this? Is it for real confession or for other purpose? The ending Hawthorne wrote for Chillingworth really reflects his inner contradiction.

#### *D. Pearl, Rebellious and Free*

Pearl was the daughter of Hester and Dimmesdale, representing rebellion and freedom. With an indocile character, Pearl is like a little bird flying freely in the sky, without any restraint. In the work, the metaphor of a little bird always showed up when Pearl was present. Under the double shocks of Puritanism and religious thoughts, Pearl, in people’s eyes, had become the child of devil, the demon. Pearl didn’t ignore and bear it, but reacted against the provocation of young Puritans until they disappeared in her sight. The clothes Pearl wore and the name she used in the house of state governor, as well as the words she replied to the old priest all reflected Pearl’s extraordinary character. She naturally had unexplainable feelings of affection on Dimmesdale, while she had indescribable feelings of disgust and contradiction on Chillingworth, all of which explained Pearl had her own instinctive reaction towards the kindness and ugliness in the world.

When Hester and Chillingworth had the negotiation on the peninsula, Pearl made her clothes by seaweed with a letter “A”. She couldn’t understand the meaning of the letter “A”, and was fully curious about the letter “A”. However, Hester couldn’t explain the meaning of the letter, because she thought Pearl was still too young to understand it. Then, Hester removed the letter “A” that Pearl especially put on. When Pearl saw that, she insisted not to get close to Hester until Hester put the scarlet letter “A” back. This plot is quite of sarcastic and critical meanings. For Pearl, the scarlet letter was everything for her, and she didn’t think the scarlet letter that Puritans felt shameful about brought shame for her, which adequately indicated the rebellion and freedom of Pearl. When Dimmesdale finally had the courage to confess his crime and talked about his guilt and confession to Pearl and Hester, Pearl kissed him in lips. The kiss indeed opened the mental chains of Dimmesdale, and three of them were finally able to get together as a family.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In the work *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne’s description of the four characters (Hester, Dimmesdale Chillingworth, and

Pearl) fully reflected his own ideology and art style. The four characters are more of Hawthorne's own true inner reflection than of symbolic meanings. In fact, there is contradiction and conflict inside Hawthorne: on the one hand, he thought the control of Puritanism was stupid and religious thoughts imprisoned the human nature; on the other hand, he couldn't deny religions completely, so it turned out that Hawthorne was also in a contradictory condition.

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