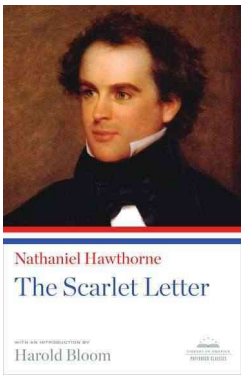
The scarlet letter

"The Scarlet Letter" reviewed by Sarah on June 15, 2010



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Name:
Sarah
Grade:
11
Title:
The Scarlet Letter
Author:
Hawthorne, Nathaniel
Genre:
historical
Write a review of the book, including plot points, if you wish:
In Nathaniel Hawthorneï¿½s classic, The Scarlet Letter, Arthur Dimmesdale, a Puritan minister living in colonial Boston, is being tormented by the sin he committed with Hester Prynne, a young woman and newcomer to Boston whose husband has been missing for two years. Initially in the first scaffold scene, Dimmesdale causes himself to become a hypocrite by concealing his sin in the depths of his heart. Through the next two scaffold scenes that take place in the novel, Dimmesdale resolves his inner struggle by realizing that truthfulness and confession are the only way to receive happiness and peace. Thus, while the first two scaffold scenes highlight Dimmesdaleï¿½s secrecy and hypocrisy, his confession and truthfulness in the third scaffold scene bring about change of heart, happiness and peace.
In the first scaffold scene, Dimmesdale refrains from truthfulness and causes himself to become a hypocrite. Reverend Dimmesdale, ordered by a fellow clergyman to question Hester Prynne to reveal her fellow sinner, becomes a hypocrite by imploring Hester to reveal her partner in crime, even though he is that very partner. Dimmesdale preaches to Hester, ï¿½If thou feelest it to be for thy soulï¿½s peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation, I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer!ï¿½ (Pg. 57)# Ironically, Dimmesdale hides his sin of being an adulterer and becomes a hypocrite by telling Hester to reveal her fellow sinner, even though he will not do it himself. Afterward, Dimmesdale begins to fear that what he has told Hester will ruin his clerical position. He shows a lack of courage to partake of Hesterï¿½s punishment and humiliation, when he further implores her, ï¿½Take heed how thou deniest to him--who perchance, hath not the courage to grasp it for

himself--the bitter, but wholesome, cup that it now presented to thy lips!ï¿½ (Pg. 58) Excessively fearful that Hester may reveal his sinfulness, Dimmesdale is relieved and awed by Hesterï¿½s generosity when she refuses to make his sin known, even when he is too afraid to reveal his own wrongdoing. Awestricken, Dimmesdale proclaims, ï¿½Wondrous strength and generosity of a womanï¿½s heart! She will not speak!ï¿½ (Pg. 59) Dimmesdale shows that he has grave respect for Hester because she accepts her punishment and does not reveal his accompanying her in her crime. As a result of Hesterï¿½s silence in the first scaffold scene, Dimmesdale withholds truthfulness and begins to pile guilt upon his conscience, resulting in his being a hypocrite.

In the second scaffold scene, Dimmesdale goes to the scaffold in the middle of the night to relieve his guilt, which shows his incomplete truthfulness and hypocrisy. Seven years after the first scaffold scene, Dimmesdale goes to the weather darkened scaffold and stands upon it. He feels so much guilt for his sinfulness and hypocrisy that he thinks standing on the scaffold will relieve some of the guilt. After Mr. Wilson passes by and does not witness Dimmesdaleï¿½s presence on the scaffold, Dimmesdale screams in the night air, ï¿½ï¿½It is done!ï¿½...covering his face with his hands. ï¿½The whole town will awake and hurry forth, and find me here!ï¿½ï¿½ (Pg. 123) Although no one wakes to find him, Dimmesdaleï¿½s visit to the scaffold in the middle of the night, instead of in the daytime when everyone can see him, proves the guilt that he feels. Then, Dimmesale further proves his guilt and fearfulness by revealing that he intends to continue to conceal his secret until death. When his daughter Pearl and his former lover Hester see him on the scaffold, Dimmesdale exclaims, ï¿½The daylight of this world shall not see our meeting!ï¿½ (Pg. 127) Dimmesdale, in going at night to the scaffold and proclaiming that the world will not see their meeting, shows that he is still not willing to expose his sinfulness to the town. Finally, Dimmesdaleï¿½s inner sufferings become even more painful because of his pride and fear to reveal his sin. Soon after his first exclamation, Dimmesdale acknowledges to his daughter Pearl, ï¿½I shall, indeed, stand with thy mother and thee one other day, but not tomorrow!ï¿½ (Pg. 127) This statement shows Dimmesdaleï¿½s pride and fear to reveal his sin, which causes his inner sufferings to grow more painful. As an advancement over the first scaffold scene, Dimmesdaleï¿½s guilt finally brings him to the scaffold; however, it is in the middle of the night when no one can see his proclamation. Consequently, although he finally stands on the scaffold, Dimmesdaleï¿½s pride and fear bring him to continue to withhold his sin in the secrecy of his heart, which, in turn, continues to place more guilt on his conscience and suffering to his heart.

In the third and final scaffold scene, Dimmesdale truthfully confesses his sin and lays bare his feelings, resulting in happiness and peace. He is excessively weak and on the brink of death when he realizes confession is the only way to achieve relief. Dimmesdale finally has a change of heart and decides to stand with Hester and Pearl on the scaffold in front of the town to make reparation for his sin. He calls to Hester, ï¿½Come, Hester, come! Support me up yonder scaffold!...let me make haste to take my shame upon me,ï¿½ and continues to tell the town, ï¿½behold me here, the one sinner of the world!...I stand upon the spot where, seven years since, I should have stood; here, with this woman...ï¿½ (pgs. 207-208) Truthfully confessing his sin in front of the town where everyone can see and hear him, Dimmesdale bravely stands with Hester and Pearl on the scaffold. Authoritatively he reveals his own scarlet letter and lets the town look upon it, thereby receiving burdensome guilt relief. Exclaiming ï¿½...he hid it cunningly from men, and walked among you with the mien of a spirit, mournful, because so pure in a sinful world!--and sad, because he missed his heavenly kindred!...Stand any here that question Godï¿½s judgment on a sinner? Behold! Behold a dreadful witness of it!ï¿½ (Pgs. 208-209) Dimmesdale reveals that he knows that he is a sinner and that he is a witness of Godï¿½s judgment on a sinner. Finally in his final breath before dying, Dimmesdale proclaims that he is relieved that he has confessed and praises God for giving him the strength and courage to go and stand upon the scaffold. He joyously exclaims, ï¿½God...is merciful! He hath proved His

mercy, most of all, in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast...Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost forever! Praised be His name! His will be done! Farewell!ï¿½ (Pg. 210) Dimmesdale finally rests in peace and happiness realizing that his tortures and confession were are the only way he could gain redemption for his soul. This confession in the third scaffold scene is a significant advancement over the second scaffold scene. Hence, with a clean conscience, Dimmesdale finally confesses his sin and reveals his scarlet letter, ultimately attaining happiness and peace for his tormented soul. Thus, Arthur Dimmesdaleï¿½s festering guilt in his soul over the first two scaffold scenes, whether to reveal or conceal his sin of adultery, eventually results in his realizing in the third scaffold scene, that honesty is the best way to avoid hypocrisy. In the first scaffold scene, Dimmesdale begins his inner conflict and hypocrisy when he does not stand upon the scaffold or reveal his sin, resulting in fear and guilt. Although he stands upon the scaffold during the night in the second scaffold scene, Dimmesdale further proves his fear, guilt and hypocrisy, but advances over the first scaffold scene by at least standing upon the scaffold. Finally, Dimmesdale, in the third and final scaffold scene, decides to confess his sin truthfully, resulting in his happiness and peace. Thus, confession and truthfulness show the one, true path to righteousness and, ultimately, redemption.

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