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PAPER 2: MODERN DRAMA AND LITERARY HERITAGE TEXTS

Assessment Objective 1

Demonstrate a close knowledge and understanding of texts, maintaining a critical style and presenting an informed personal engagement

Assessment Objective 2

Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects

Assessment Objective 4

Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written

A01 – is worth 17% of marks

A02 – is worth 17% of marks

A04 – is worth 7% of marks

This chapter focuses on Paper 2: Modern Drama and Literary Heritage Texts of the English Literature course. Working through these lessons and activities will help you develop the reading and writing skills you will need for the Paper 2 exam.

The chapter is split into the following sections:

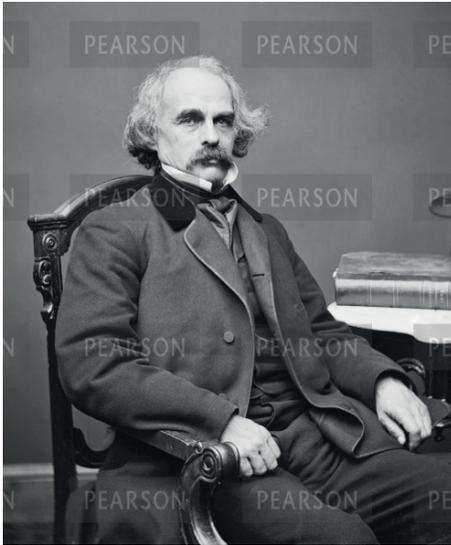
- Modern drama
- Literary heritage

Paper 2 is worth 40% of the total marks for the course and is split into two sections:

- Section A: Modern drama
- Section B: Literary heritage

In section A of your exam you will need to be able to meet assessment objectives A01 and A02.

In section B of your exam you will need to be able to meet assessment objectives A01, A02 and A04.



▲ Nathaniel Hawthorne

GENERAL VOCABULARY

Puritans a group of English people who were part of the Protestant denomination of the Christian church; they typically had very strict religious views on morality, especially sexuality

background someone's upbringing, family history and childhood experiences

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

autobiographical relating to a person's own life, in this case, Hawthorne's life

THE SCARLET LETTER NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Scarlet Letter was published in 1850, but it is set 200 years earlier among a group of people called the **Puritans**. During the 17th century, the Puritans travelled from England to settle on the east coast of America, in an area now called New England. Puritan life was defined by a strict set of Christian morals and rules and by the need to establish a working civilisation in the relatively wild and untamed landscape of America. These themes appear in Hawthorne's representation of Puritan life in *The Scarlet Letter*.

The Puritans are significant in American history because they established many aspects of American life as it was lived during the 19th century, when Hawthorne lived and wrote. In fact, in many ways, they established many aspects of modern American life as it continues to be lived today. This means that looking back at the Puritans is often a way in which writers like Hawthorne can examine the present day, whether that present day was in the 19th or 20th century. Although *The Scarlet Letter* is set 200 years before the time Hawthorne wrote it, he uses a depiction of the politics and morality of the Puritans to reflect on the political and social issues that defined his own time. These include the political divisions and the disagreements over how best to organise society; these led to the American Civil War, which broke out ten years after *The Scarlet Letter* was published.

- **Research Nathaniel Hawthorne's life and identify any events that you think may have influenced him when he was writing *The Scarlet Letter*. How useful do you think it is to consider the writer's own life when thinking about the stories that they write?**

Hawthorne's representation of Puritanism, as well as other aspects of *The Scarlet Letter*, relate to his own **background**. Hawthorne's family history could be traced all the way back to the Puritan immigrants of the 17th century. He was born and spent much of his life in Salem, which is close to the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*, Boston. The introductory section of the novel, entitled 'The Custom-House', is particularly **autobiographical**. Like the narrator of 'The Custom-House', Hawthorne had worked in the Salem custom-house when he needed money and, like the narrator, he also lost his job due to changes in the politics

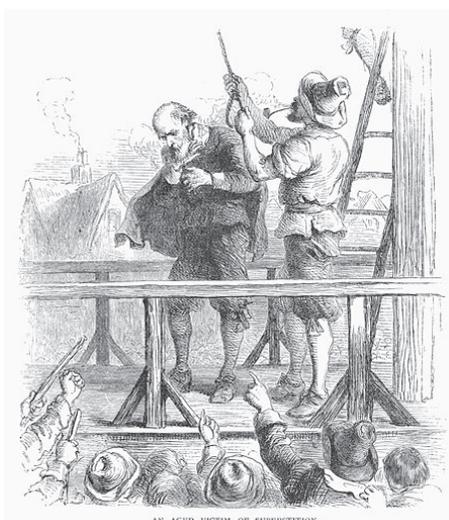
GENERAL VOCABULARY

Native Americans different groups of native people who lived in North America and South America before the arrival of European settlers

governing the city. It is interesting to think about the ways in which this autobiographical element relates to *The Scarlet Letter* as a whole.

- ▶ There are several moments where **Native Americans**, who lived in New England before the arrival of the Puritans, appear or are mentioned in *The Scarlet Letter*. Find these moments and think about what purpose they serve in the novel.

PLOT



AN AGED VICTIM OF SUPERSTITION.

- ▲ A public scaffold.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

adultery having a sexual relationship with someone other than one's husband or wife
minister MISSING DEFINITION
embroidery decorative sewing.

The Scarlet Letter begins with a section entitled 'The Custom-House', which does not contribute to the plot or introduce the characters. Instead, it sets out several of the novel's major themes. These include the relationship between the individual and society, the best form of political organisation and the idea of duty. This section is also highly autobiographical and reflects some events that took place in Hawthorne's own life.

The story itself begins in the centre of Boston, at the scaffold, which is a large public stage also used to hang criminals. A crowd is gathered and Hester Prynne is brought before them, carrying a child and wearing an embroidered scarlet 'A' on her chest. It is revealed that she is being punished for the crime of **adultery**, because she conceived her child while her husband was still in England. Her husband is now presumed to be lost at sea, and Hester refuses to reveal the name of her child's father. The young and well-respected **minister**, Arthur Dimmesdale, asks her to reveal the name, but she still refuses.

- ▶ What do you think the scaffold represents in *The Scarlet Letter*?

An elderly male onlooker in the crowd signals to Hester not to speak by putting his finger over his lips. It is later revealed that this man is Roger Chillingworth, who is a scholar and doctor and also Hester's husband. He visits Hester in prison and swears her to secrecy about his identity as her husband. He says that he understands her reasons for committing adultery but that he blames the man with whom she was adulterous.

Hester is released from prison and several years pass. She lives a virtuous life and makes a living through her **embroidery**, but is treated as a social outcast because of her crime and the 'A' around her neck. Her daughter Pearl grows up wild and untamed due to her lack of contact with the rest of society. At one point, the town authorities try to take Pearl away from Hester, fearing that she is being brought up in an ungodly way, but Arthur Dimmesdale intervenes to protect Hester and Pearl. Dimmesdale becomes ill, seeming to waste away despite his youth and popularity in the town. This leads Roger Chillingworth, as the town doctor, to become increasingly close to him. Eventually, Chillingworth moves in with Dimmesdale in order to treat his illness. Chillingworth begins to suspect that Dimmesdale may be Pearl's father and confirms this to himself one afternoon when he sees Dimmesdale sleeping.

One night, Hester and Pearl encounter Dimmesdale standing on the scaffold out of guilt for his crime. They join him and the three stand together as a family, but Dimmesdale refuses to acknowledge their relationship in public, insisting that it must stay secret. A meteor crosses the sky and spells out the letter 'A'.

Hester asks Chillingworth to stop adding to Dimmesdale's woes by being constantly present in his life, but Chillingworth refuses. She fears that Chillingworth is about to reveal the secret and she and Dimmesdale decide to flee with Pearl to Europe to begin a new life. The day on which they plan to sail from Boston is an important Puritan holiday and, feeling that he is about to be released from his torment, Dimmesdale gives a particularly inspiring sermon to the townspeople. However, Hester learns that Chillingworth knows of their plan and is going to ruin it by accompanying them. If they refuse to let him go with them, he will reveal their secret. In desperation, Dimmesdale climbs onto the scaffold and confesses his crime. He reveals a red 'A' scarred into his chest, which the reader assumes is what Chillingworth saw while Dimmesdale was sleeping, and then Dimmesdale dies.

Shortly afterwards, Chillingworth also dies. Hester and Pearl leave Boston for many years. One day, Hester returns alone and moves back into her old cottage. She continues to wear the 'A', but is now respected throughout the town for her good works and charity. She receives letters and lavish gifts which suggest that Pearl has married into wealth, but this is never confirmed. When Hester eventually dies, she is buried alongside Dimmesdale under a grave marked with an 'A'.

- **Why does Hawthorne not confirm what has happened to Pearl at the end of *The Scarlet Letter*, instead just hinting that she has married well and is sending Hester gifts and letters?**

CHARACTERS

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

protagonist the main character in a story

HESTER PRYNNE

- the **protagonist**
- the most complex character in *The Scarlet Letter*
- beautiful and good-natured
- willing to protect and care for Dimmesdale despite the fact that he has wronged her and refuses to publicly admit it
- devoted to charity work
- an outcast from society because she disobeyed Boston's strict Puritan morals
- a representation of the conflict between society and the individual

PEARL

- the daughter of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale
- presented as a wild force of nature raised outside the rules and conventions that govern Boston society
- considered a devil at times by Boston's religious rulers
- sometimes cruel, taunting her mother about her 'A'
- loving and affectionate, coming to love Arthur Dimmesdale and publicly kissing him before he dies

ARTHUR DIMMESDALE

- Pearl's father and Hester's co-adulterer
- an excellent public speaker
- uses his speaking skills to convince the town that he is a good man
- too cowardly to damage his reputation by telling the truth about what he has done
- morally aware of right and wrong, despite being a coward
- unable to ignore his moral awareness of right and wrong, which leads to his illness and death
- a weak person rather than an evil one

► *The Scarlet Letter* by Hugues Merle.

- How do you think this painting represents Hester? Can you see anyone else in the painting? Who do you think they might be?



ROGER CHILLINGWORTH

- Hester's husband
- a doctor and scholar in the town.
- understanding and forgiving regarding Hester's adultery
- able to recognise that he is much older than Hester and that their marriage was a bad idea
- relentlessly cruel to Dimmesdale
- often described as being like a devil in pursuing Dimmesdale's destruction

- Think about the character of Mistress Hibbins. What characterises the moment when she appears in the novel? What tends to happen in such moments? Is Mistress Hibbins aligned more with nature and the wilderness or with the forces of religious authority and civilisation?

MISTRESS HIBBINS

- Govenor Bellingham's sister
- widely believed to be a witch
- often associated with the forest where she interacts with the 'Black Man', who is presumed to be the devil
- willing to tempt Hester to join her in her satanic activities in the forest, but is unsuccessful

GENERAL VOCABULARY

hypocrite someone who publicly claims to hold certain beliefs while acting completely differently in their own private life

insincere publicly expressing feelings that are not actually felt

GOVERNOR BELLINGHAM

- the political leader and authority figure of Boston
- the leader of Hester's punishment and tries to take Pearl away from her
- presented as a **hypocrite**, as he imposes strict Puritanism on everyone else while living in a luxurious mansion
- representative of the harsh, rigid and **insincere** morality of Boston's rulers

REVEREND JOHN WILSON

- Dimmesdale's superior in the church
- unable to recognise that, when he finds Dimmesdale standing on the scaffold at night, it is because Dimmesdale is guilty of a crime
- representative of the foolish, but ultimately well-meaning, nature of Boston's religious leaders

THE NARRATOR OF 'THE CUSTOM-HOUSE'

- a thinly veiled version of Hawthorne himself
- used to provide some explanation as to how *The Scarlet Letter* came to be written
- distinct from the apparently less autobiographical narrative voice used in the rest of the novel; the connection between these narrative voices is strongly debated

THEMES

GENERAL VOCABULARY

the Ten Commandments ten rules of moral behaviour given in the Bible and followed by Christian churches

RELIGION

In the Puritan society of *The Scarlet Letter*, religion plays a very different role than it does in modern western societies. There is no separation between church and state. Instead the law, political power and religion are all closely intermingled. By committing adultery, Hester commits a religious sin because she has broken one of **the Ten Commandments**. However, she also commits a legal offence that is punished as a crime through the city's legal code. Religion in *The Scarlet Letter* cannot be separated from any aspect of society and its presence can be felt everywhere.

Hawthorne is generally critical of figures who have gained power or authority through this intermingling of religion and politics. In particular, he often presents them as hypocritical because they do not obey the rules that they impose on the rest of society. For example, Arthur Dimmesdale is thought of as a good and moral man by his congregation, but in fact he is hiding his sin from the world. Similarly, Governor Bellingham is also presented as a hypocrite because he lives in a grand mansion while preaching strict Puritan values to the town. As the narrator states, 'the brilliancy [of the mansion] might have befitted Aladdin's palace, rather than the mansion of a grave old Puritan ruler'.

- **Why is Roger Chillingworth so often associated with the devil and described in terms of devilry? How does this treatment of his character relate to the theme of religion in the novel as a whole?**



▲ New England Puritans

► Research the reasons why the Puritans left England to settle in America.

THE INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIETY

One of the most important themes of *The Scarlet Letter* is the relationship between the individual and society. Society, in the form of the city rulers or the townspeople, often seeks complete control over the individual. For example, they try to take Pearl away from Hester. They also try to extract the secret about Pearl's father from Hester. They do not recognise the right of individuals to possess any identity of their own that is separate from society.

In contrast, Hester Prynne often represents the desire of the individual to keep some independence from the crowd and from the town authorities. This can be seen when she first appears on the town scaffold. The women in the crowd are described as 'hard-featured' and 'coarse', but Hester is described as 'elegant', 'beautiful' and 'delicate', which marks her individuality and her separation from a society of people who are all the same. Hester comes to embrace the lonely, individualistic life that she lives in her cottage, which is separated from the rest of the town. She even chooses to live there after returning from her years abroad. She also raises Pearl as a child who is purely natural, existing as an individual outside society's rules and conventions.

DUTY

The theme of duty arises from this conflict between the individual and society. *The Scarlet Letter* particularly focuses on what happens when there is a conflict between different duties – for example, when Hester's duty to raise Pearl comes into conflict with her duty to obey the town authorities who want to raise Pearl themselves. Many different kinds of duty come into conflict with one another in this way throughout the course of the novel, including:

- duty to religious morals
- duty to social laws
- duty to oneself
- duty to one's child
- duty to one's legal husband
- duty to one's romantic lover.

One important way in which this idea of duty is expressed in *The Scarlet Letter* is through the use and depiction of secrets. Hester has a duty to Roger Chillingworth as her husband, but this duty conflicts with her duty to Arthur Dimmesdale, to keep his secret as she had promised to. In the same way, Hester also has a duty to Roger Chillingworth to keep his identity secret, as she promised to, but also a duty to protect Arthur Dimmesdale, which might involve revealing the secret of Chillingworth's identity to Dimmesdale. Therefore, this complex conflict between the duty owed to society and the duty owed to oneself and one's personal relationships is often represented through secrets.

AO?

ACTIVITY 1

▼ DUTY

Copy and complete the table, making a list of the major characters in *The Scarlet Letter*. List all of the duties that each character owes, either to themselves, to other individuals, to family or to society. Look out for points where duties contradict with each other.

▼ CHARACTER	▼ DUTIES
Pearl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To her own nature as a free spirit. ■ To respect and later care for her mother.
Hester Prynne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To the puritan society of Boston and its rules. ■ To Roger Chillingworth, her husband. ■ To Arthur Dimmesdale, her lover. ■ To Pearl, her daughter.

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

symbol something used to represent something else; it is usually used to present an abstract concept in a visual way, such as the wild rose-bush outside the prison door that acts as a symbol of nature and the wilderness

CIVILISATION VERSUS THE WILDERNESS

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Boston is a new town, still in the process of being founded. This means that there is a very fine line between the civilisation being built, represented by the town, and the natural wilderness that the town is replacing. Boston is described as ‘a little town, on the edge of the Western wilderness’.

The forest is an important **symbol** of the wilderness. It is located right on the edge of the town and often seems to threaten the town’s Puritan values of civilisation and order. For example, it is where Mistress Hibbins is thought to communicate with the devil and where Dimmesdale and Hester meet in order to conduct their affair in secret.

The relationship between civilisation and wilderness is symbolised in an image in the first chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*: the image of the ‘wild rose-bush’ that grows outside the prison door. The bush and the prison represent nature and civilisation existing side by side. The fact that the prisoners are shown to be comforted by the roses before entering the prison may have been intended by Hawthorne to show the superiority of nature over human order.

AUTHOR’S CRAFT

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

irony using words to convey a meaning that is completely opposite to their apparent meaning

IRONY

Hawthorne uses **irony** throughout *The Scarlet Letter*. For example, in the chapter entitled ‘The Elf-Child and the Minister’, Governor Bellingham is described as if he were very grand and important because he looks stern and wears grand clothes, but the actual effect communicated to the reader is that he is ridiculous and foolish. This effect is used to mock Boston’s authority figures and townspeople throughout the novel.

- Both in 'The Custom-House' and the main body of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne's narrative voice makes statements about the uselessness of writing and books. For example, the narrator says, 'I cared not, at this period, for books; they were apart from me'. How do statements such as this contribute to the role of irony in the novel?

Irony also involves the combination of qualities that contradict each other within a single person. It is ironic that Governor Bellingham preaches Puritanism for others while living in lavish finery himself. It is ironic that Arthur Dimmesdale is such an eloquent public speaker and yet is unable to speak the words that would free him from the torment of keeping his secret. It is ironic that Hester Prynne is treated as an outcast by a strict Puritan society that values virtue despite the fact that she is one of the most virtuous characters in the novel.

AO?

ACTIVITY 2

▼ IRONY

Copy and complete the table, listing the people or institutions in *The Scarlet Letter* that you think Hawthorne treats with irony. For each one describe how you think the effect of irony is achieved.

▼ SUBJECT OF IRONY	▼ HOW THE EFFECT IS ACHIEVED
Arthur Dimmesdale	By making him a great public speaker who won't state his most important secret in public.
Governor Bellingham	By having him preach strict Puritanism and the value of self-restraint while living in a grand mansion.

NARRATIVE ORGANISATION

The Scarlet Letter is largely structured around the opposition between public and private spaces. It moves back and forth between public scenes, set in places such as the town scaffold or the Governor's mansion, and private scenes, set in places like Hester's cottage or the forest. This alternating narrative structure plays an important role in communicating many of the novel's key themes, such as the opposition between individual and society, and the need to preserve secrets from public view.

The novel is also structured around the three scenes set on the scaffold:

- the scene in which Hester first emerges from prison before the crowd wearing her 'A'
- the scene where Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold at night and is joined by Hester and Pearl
- the scene in which Dimmesdale confesses and dies.

These scenes occur at the beginning, the middle and the end of the novel and they contain its most dramatic and important moments. This shows the significance in Puritan society of public spaces such as the scaffold, as well as the ideas of ceremony and of punishment that are associated with them.

LANGUAGE AND SYMBOLISM

GENERAL VOCABULARY

the Old Testament the first part of the Bible

LANGUAGE

Hawthorne has a particularly complex way of writing that can often be difficult to read. He uses strange, old-fashioned words like ‘ignominy’ and ‘verily’, and long sentences that are made up of many separate clauses. One reason he writes in this way is to produce a feeling of authority and importance. In particular, this kind of language echoes the language of **the Old Testament**, thus reflecting the religious world of Puritan New England. This important-sounding language is also key to producing irony. Ridiculous people like Mistress Hibbins or Governor Bellingham seem funnier if they are described in very grand language.

However, despite the complexity of Hawthorne’s language, one of the most important uses of language in *The Scarlet Letter* is silence or refusing to speak. Hester’s refusal to name Pearl’s father, either on the scaffold or later on, is far more powerful than any of her words could be. Likewise, Dimmesdale’s silence and his refusal to confess reveals his character far more effectively than his eloquent speeches and sermons.

AO?

ACTIVITY 3

▼ LANGUAGE

Work with a partner. One of you list all of the moments in the novel where speaking is important. The other list all of the moments where not speaking and remaining silent is important. Then discuss what you have found with your partner. Consider these questions:

- ▶ **Where do these events take place? Are there certain spaces where speech tends to happen and certain places where silence tends to happen?**
- ▶ **Do certain characters tend to speak and others to remain silent?**

▼ SPEAKING IS IMPORTANT

Arthur Dimmesdale confesses on the scaffold.

Pearl asks open and honest questions about Arthur Dimmesdale and his relationship to her and Hester.

▼ SILENCE IS IMPORTANT

Roger Chillingworth signals for Hester to remain silent when he sees her on the scaffold.

Hawthorne does not reveal what has happened to Pearl at the end of the novel.

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

symbolism using symbols to represent particular concepts or ideas

SYMBOLISM

Symbolism is used throughout *The Scarlet Letter*. For example, symbols of nature are consistently built up using flowers, the sea and the forest. This natural imagery plays an important role in terms of character and theme, for example, in the figure of Pearl, by defining her as a child of nature as opposed to a child of society. In contrast, the town is often associated with symbols of punishment and death, such as the scaffold or the prison and graveyard, which are mentioned in the early chapter entitled ‘The Prison-Door’.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

static not moving; fixed

The Scarlet Letter that hangs around Hester's neck is also a symbol. Indeed, it is a symbol that is repeated at significant points in the plot. First, it is repeated in the letter 'A' that the meteor makes in the sky as Hester, Dimmesdale and Pearl stand on the scaffold. Much later, it is repeated again in the letter 'A' carved on Hester and Dimmesdale's shared tombstone. The 'A' is a particularly interesting symbol because its meaning changes. It starts off as a symbol of Hester's crime and sin, but by the end of the novel it serves instead as a symbol of her goodness. This shows that, while some symbols are **static** and have fixed meanings, Hawthorne is also interested in the way that the meaning of symbols can shift and become a site of conflict. For example, when Hester uses her embroidery skills to make the letter beautiful and therefore contradict its original Puritanical purpose, this is a sign of this symbolic conflict.

A0?

ACTIVITY 4

▼ SYMBOLS

Pick a theme of *The Scarlet Letter* and list the ways in which Hawthorne uses symbolism to communicate it. For example, you could say, 'The theme of the restrictiveness of Puritan society is communicated through symbols of punishment, such as the prison, the scaffold and Hester Prynne's scarlet letter.'

EXAM-STYLE QUESTIONS

¹ A01: This opening shows an understanding of text overall in relation to the question.

² A02: To comment more closely on Hawthorne's technique, could be it explained how she is a symbol?

³ A02: It's a good idea to mention a few relevant points in the introduction, before writing about them in detail later on. Can you think of any more symbols that could have been included?

⁴ A01: For good written style, you might need to think of synonyms for key words in the question. Can you think of any synonyms for 'symbol'?

- 1 Compare and contrast the characters of Roger Chillingworth and Arthur Dimmesdale.
- 2 How does Hawthorne explore the conflict between society and the individual in *The Scarlet Letter*?
- 3 Explore the relationship between Hester Prynne and Pearl.
- 4 What is the significance of silence or the refusal to speak in *The Scarlet Letter*?
- 5 Explore the significance of symbols in *The Scarlet Letter*.

There are a wide range of symbols present within *The Scarlet Letter*, making symbolism a very important technique for Hawthorne. ¹ The use of visual symbols often associated with nature allows for character development and the introduction of interesting metaphors. An example of this is Pearl who has grown up away from civilised society and is much closer to nature, making her a vibrant character. ² In contrast, the scaffold is a clear symbol of death within the story. ³ The letter from the book's title is another reoccurring symbol ⁴, described by the narrator as 'a mystic symbol'. By calling it this, the reader can understand that it is not just a symbol of shame as the townspeople want, but also has different meanings.

HINT

In the exam, you will have 45 minutes in which to write your essay. There will be a choice of two questions on the paper. Use these to practise exam technique and timing. Remember to consider language, form and structure and refer to the context of the novel in your response.