Conclusion

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear, that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressionable by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now...

It is a ridiculous demand which England and America make, that you shall speak so that they can understand you. Neither man nor toadstools grow so. As if that were important, and there were not enough to understand you without them...

Some are dinning in our ears that Americans, and moderns generally, are intellectual dwarfs compared with the ancients, or even the Elizabethan men. But what is that to the purpose? A living dog is better than a dead lion. Shall a man go and hang himself because he belongs to the race of pygmies, and not be the biggest pygmy that he can? Let everyone mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made.

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed and in such desperate enterprises? I a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away...

The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this may be the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats. It was not always dry land where we dwell. I see far inland the banks which the stream anciently washed, before science began to record its freshets. Everyone has heard the story which has gone to the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer’s kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts- from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this? Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many
concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society, deposited at first in the alburnum of the green and living tree, which has been gradually converted into the semblance of its well-seasoned tomb-heard perchance gnawing out now for years by the astonished family of man, as they sat round the festive board-may unexpectedly come forth from amidst society’s most trivial and handselled furniture, to enjoy its perfect summer life at last!

I do not say that John of Jonathan will realize all this; but such is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

Activities

Classroom Assignment:
Answer the following questions by writing a short paragraph for each response:
1. How did Thoreau earn a living while at Walden?
2. What did he think of the wisdom of the old men?
3. What did he consider to be the necessities of life for men? What was his view of luxuries?
4. How did he obtain food for himself?
5. Why is morning the best time of the day to Thoreau? How does he apply the morning as the best part of the day to his personal philosophy?
6. Why does Thoreau say he went to the woods?
7. Instead of glorifying God, what would be the chief end of man according to Thoreau?
8. What were Thoreau’s views of news, newspapers, and the post office?
9. In the conclusion, what is the strongest statement defending individualism?
10. What application to life does Thoreau make from the story of the bug buried in the table leaf?

Essay questions to be debated during the class period:
1. What are Thoreau’s desires in life?
2. What is he telling people who are materialistic?
3. How does the writer describe the setting?
4. Why did Thoreau choose this particular way of life? Does he enjoy solitude?

Homework Assignment:
In *Walden*, Thoreau uses various rhetorical devices to make his point. Give examples of repetition and comparisons. He also uses figurative language. Investigate the meaning of allusion and metaphor. Find and explain allusion and metaphor in the following famous passage:
Some are dinning in our ears that we Americans, and moderns generally, are intellectual dwarfs compared with the ancients, or even the Elizabethan men. But what is that too the purpose? A living dog is better than a dead lion. Shall a man go and hang himself because he belongs to the race of pygmies, and not be the biggest pygmy that he can? Let everyone mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made.

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

**Biography**

Walt Whitman

1819 - 1892

Walt Whitman was America's first modern poet. He went to school only five years and then spent much time loafing and observing the life around him; he enjoyed the theater, music, and great literature, including the Bible, but he rejected its message. Instead, he followed the Transcendental thought of Emerson, believing in the innate goodness of man and taking a mystical view of nature. As a young man, Whitman heard Emerson lecture and read his essays. Later, he said he could never have written his poems if he had not first "come to himself", and that Emerson had helped him "find himself": "I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil."

His major work was a collection of poems called *Leaves of Grass*. It was revised many times throughout Whitman's lifetime, but was first printed at his own expense; because of its subject matter and style, no publisher would touch it. In the preface, Whitman declared that no subjects were forbidden to the poet and that the form of his poetry should reflect a freedom from restraint. In *Leaves of Grass* Whitman did create a new kind of poetry in America and freed it from the restraints of traditional meter and rhyme by introducing free verse, which many modern poets have since followed. Whitman compared free verse to the ocean: "Its verses are the liquid, billowy waves, ever rising and falling, perhaps sunny and smooth, perhaps wild with storms, always moving, always alike in nature as rolling waves, but hardly any two alike in size or measure." For the skilled craftsman, free verse does not mean an escape; T.S. Eliot, who himself used free verse extensively, said that no verse is really free "for the man who wants to do a good job."

It was not the style, however, so much as the frank, vulgar subject matter of *Leaves of Grass* that offended many readers. Typical of poems from *Leaves of Grass* is "Song of Myself", which celebrates not only the speaker's personal identity, but the identity of all
Americans. Since Whitman believed that man was his own god, he had no sense of guilt, sin, and accountability to God. In attempting to defy the common man, Whitman alienated the very people he wanted to reach and actually lowered man in his thinking to the level of an animal in the following defiant and irreverent lines from “Song of Myself”: “I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained... They do not sweat and whine about their condition. They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins. They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.”

Because of his attempt for traditional morality, it is no surprise that many of the great poets of the day found Leaves of Grass unacceptable. Only Emerson, at first, had a fondness for it. He told Whitman, “I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed... I find incomparable things said incomparably well... I greet you at the beginning of a great career.” Later, even Emerson lost his enthusiasm for Whitman and said that he had expected Whitman to make the songs of the nation, but that he “seemed content to make the inventories” (referring to Whitman’s technique of listing or cataloguing endless series of details in his poems).

When John Greenleaf Whittier received a copy of Leaves of Grass, he threw it into the fire and called it a “mixture of Yankee transcendentalism and New York rowdiness.” Bayard Taylor, in the New York Tribune, accused Whitman of obscenity, and a review in The Boston Post declared, “Grass is the gift of God for healthy sustenance of His creatures, and its nature ought not be desecrated being so improperly bestowed upon these foul and rank leaves of the poison-plants of egotism, irreverence, and lust.”

Whitman encountered conflicts throughout his life, losing a newspaper job as a young man because of his extreme anti-slavery views and losing a government job as an older man because of the indecencies in his poetry.

When he could direct his mind toward good subjects, he could often write good poetry, however. His best poems express his love for America (“I Hear America Singing”), his concern over the Civil War (“Beat! Beat! Drums!”), and his warmth for President Abraham Lincoln, whom he greatly admired (“O Captain, My Captain!”, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”).

**Activities**

Classroom Assignment:

Answer and discuss the following questions in class:

1. Who had a great influence on Whitman’s life and his writings?
2. How did he view nature?
3. How does free verse defer from the traditional meter and rhyme in poetry?
4. Explain the comparison between free verse and the ocean done by Whitman.

5. How did the writer feel about slavery?

6. How did other writers react to Whitman's writings?

Each student will choose an author previously studied or a character from a story previously read. They will ask each other questions in order to guess each other's identity.

Homework Assignment:
Write a one page report on slavery explaining its origin and how it came to affect America. Tell how it evolved in time and how African Americans are seen presently.

Literary Work
from *Leaves of Grass*, excerpt from "Song of Myself"

In this poem Whitman not only celebrates his own personal identity but also the identity of all Americans collectively.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to spread at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.

A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands,
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrance designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark, and say Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.

Activities

Classroom Assignment:
Write a summary on the following questions:
1. What attitudes does the speaker express in the first section?
2. What three metaphors for grass are effectively used and why?
3. What meaning is the poet trying to communicate?
4. How does the poem make you feel?
3. How is reading poetry different from reading short stories?
Homework Assignment:
Write a one page composition on the speaker's personal identity as well as the identity of all Americans according to the poem Song of Myself. Explain how one can or can not observe this trait in modern society.
Read Moby Dick by Herman Melville. Be prepared to discuss the novel in class.

Biography
Emily Dickinson
1830 - 1886

Emily Dickinson was another New England woman who wrote during the Civil War era. But we find no mention of the war or any other great national event in her poetry. She lived a quiet, very private life in a big old house in her little hometown of Amherst, Massachusetts. Of all the great writers of the nineteenth century, she had the least influence on her times. Yet, because she was cut off from the outside world, she was able to create a very personal and pure reputation grown enormously and her poetry is now seen as very modern for its time.

Emily Dickinson, a native of New England, wrote short, untitled poems, usually employing a four-line stanza. They were full of passion, wit, and humor. After her schooling, she isolated herself in her house, dressing only in white and seeing only a few close friends. Living in such an isolated, unreal world seemed to strengthen her imagination as a poet. She was able to see the most common and ordinary things in an unusual way and express herself accordingly in strikingly modern language and form. In spite of her eccentric behavior and odd religious notions, she wrote many delightful poems dealing with aspiration, love, nature, death, and immortality. Although she wrote almost two thousand poems, only a handful were published during her lifetime and most of them without her consent. After her death, her poems were discovered and published by her sister.

Dickinson received an excellent education as a girl. She read much from the Bible and the Transcendentalists. During her life she also sought after the device of a popular literary critic. Nevertheless, Emily Dickinson's writing is unique, for in the end she followed no one's advice or style of writing but her own. There is very little other writing to compare with her style.

Emily Dickinson had a profound and lasting interest in death. Her interest is not a morbid one, however, and probably indicates her confidence in the Puritan education. She grew up with even though she could never acknowledge it. She wrote about death in more than five hundred different poems. The poems on death fall into three main groups: physical, personified, and social. The physical group looks at death as a doctor might look at death, the
second group makes death a person, and the final group of poems about elegies and epitaphs to friends and people she admired. Second to death, but equally important, is Emily Dickinson's study of nature. By nature, Dickinson means the things we see, hear, and feel. She felt happy just being alive and living with nature; this was a common topic in her poems. Her favorite authors included Shakespeare, Keast, the Brownings, Rusking, and Sir Thomas Browne. Her greatest lyrics were on the theme of death, which she typically personified as a monarch, or a lord; or a kindly but irresistible lover. She perceived beauty in the wholeness and harmonious relationship of nature. In total, Emily Dickinson wrote almost eighteen hundred poems during her life. She is clearly a major poet in the history of American literature.

Activities

Classroom Assignment:
Answer the following questions in complete sentences.
1. Why is it said that Emily Dickinson lived in her own separate world?
2. Mention the two topics Emily Dickinson wrote about.
3. What were the three kinds of poems Emily Dickinson wrote about death? Explain each kind.
4. What does Emily Dickinson mean by nature?
5. How did she personify death?

Homework Assignment:
Write a concise report about the preference of the author to write about death and nature. Include a brief description of Emily Dickinson.

Literary Work
"Because I Could Not Stop For Death"

Emily Dickinson, true to her nature, expresses a highly creative view of death and eternity.

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.
We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labour, and my leisure too,
For his civility.
We passed the school where children played
Their lessons scarcely done;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling on the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Activities

Classroom Assignment:
Students will answer the following questions.
1. Do you consider that Emily Dickinson's way of writing was influenced by historical events? Explain.
2. Mention the two topics Emily Dickinson wrote about.
3. What figurative language is used in the poem?
4. How is death described in the poem?
5. Point out imagery in the poem.
6. How does this poem make you feel?
7. How do you think Emily felt when she wrote the poem?

Homework Assignment:
In pairs, write a literary analysis about the poem. Be ready to read it aloud during the next lesson.
Literary Work

“The Day Came Slow, till Five O’clock”
Notice the usual way that sunrise is described.

The day came slow, till five o’clock
Then sprang before the hills
Like hindered rubies, or the light
A sudden musket spills.

The purple could not keep the east,
The sunrise shook from fold,
Like breadths of topaz, packed a night,
The lady just unrolled.

The happy winds their timbrels took;
The birds, in docile rows,
Arranged themselves around their prince-
(The wind is prince of those).

The orchard sparkled like a jewel,-
How mighty ‘twas, to stay
A guest in this stupendous place,
The parlor of the day!

Activities

Classroom Assignment:
Students will read the poem aloud and then they will answer the following questions.
1. Point out the imagery and the figurative language in the poem.
2. Identify the theme in the poem.
3. In the poem, how is nature described?
4. Identify at least two literary devices in the poem.
5. What is your opinion of the poem?

Homework Assignment:
Write a paragraph explaining the use of the following words in the poem: rubies, topaz, jewel
Biography
Nathaniel Hawthorne
1804 - 1864

Nathaniel Hawthorne, one of the first great American novelists and short story writers, was born into an old New England family of Salem, Massachusetts. He was convinced of man's innate sinful nature, and he forcefully expresses his view in his penetrating characterizations and his use of themes dealing with sin and guilt. The Scarlet Letter (in Beginnings of American Literature, p.273), published in 1850, became his most popular and greatest novel and insured his literary success. The next three years were the most productive for his novels, which included The House of Seven Gables, a Romantic novel about Colonel Pyncheon's pretentious house and the curse on the Pyncheon family that is finally broken by a new generation of lovers, (1851); The Blithedale Romance, which is modeled after the Transcendental experiment of Brook Farm (1852); and his classics for children, A Wonder Book (1852) and Tanglewood Tales (1853). In 1853, President Franklin Pierce appointed Hawthorne consul to Liverpool, and while he lived in England and traveled in Europe, he kept notebooks and wrote his last major work, The Marble Faun (1860). He returned to Concord in 1860 and traveled around New England until his death in 1864.

Activities

Classroom Assignment:
In groups of three answer the following questions.
1. What was Hawthorne convinced of?
2. What was his greatest novel?
3. How does Hawthorne express his point of view?
4. Which is your favorite to read essays, poems, short stories or novels? Why?

Homework Assignment:
Investigate to find out more details of Nathaniel Hawthorne's life.
Read Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe and be prepared to discuss it in class.

Literary Work
from The Scarlett Letter, a romance

1

THE PRISON- DOOR

A throng of bearded men, in sad-colored garments and gray, steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women, some wearing hoods, and others bareheaded, was assembled in front of a wooden edifice, the door of which was heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes.
The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison. In accordance with this rule, it may safely be assumed that the forefathers of Boston had built the first prison-house, somewhere in the vicinity of Cornhill, almost as seasonably as they marked out the first burial-ground, on Isaac Johnson’s lot, and round about his grave, which subsequently became the nucleus of all the congregated sepulchres in the old church-yard of King’s Chapel. Certain it is, that, some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age, which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front. The rust on the ponderous ironwork of its oaken door looked more antique than anything else in the new world. Like all that pertains to crime, it seemed never to have known a youthful era. Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass-plot, much overgrown with burdock, pig-weed, apple-peru, and such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison. But, on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him.

This rose-bush, by a strange chance, has been kept alive in history; but whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness, so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally overshadowed it,—or whether, as there is fair authority for believing, it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson, as she entered the prison-door,—we shall not take upon us to determine. Finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that inauspicious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers and present it to the reader. It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow.

2

THE MARKET PLACE

The grass-plot before the jail, in Prison Lane, on a certain summer morning, not less than two centuries ago, was occupied by a pretty large number of the inhabitants of Boston; all with their eyes intently fastened on the iron-clamped oaken door. Amongst any other population, or at a later period in the history of New England, the grim rigidity that petrified the
bearded physiognomies of these good people would have augured some awful business in hand. It could have betokened nothing short of the anticipated execution of some noted culprit, on whom the sentence of a legal or a legal tribunal had but confirmed the verdict of public sentiment. But, in that early severity of the Puritan character, an inference of this kind could not so indubitably be drawn. It might be that a sluggish bond-servant, or an undutiful child, whom his parents had given over to the civil authority, was to be corrected at the whipping-post. It might be, that an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist, was to be scourged out of the town, or an idle and vagrant Indian, whom the white man's fire-water had make riotous about the streets, was to be driven with stripes into the shadow of the forest. It might be, too, that a witch, like old Mistress Hibbins, the bitter-tempered widow of the magistrate, was to die upon the gallows. In either case, there was very much the same solemnity of demeanor on the part of the spectators; as befitted a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and the severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful. Meagre, indeed, and cold, was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for, from such bystanders at the scaffold. On the other hand, a penalty which, in our days, would infer a degree of mocking infamy and ridicule, might then be invested with almost as stern a dignity a the punishment of death itself.

It was circumstance to be noted, on the summer morning when our story begins its course, that the women, of whom there were several in the crowd, appeared to take a peculiar interest in whatever penal infliction might be expected to ensue. The age had not so much refinement, that any sense of impropriety restrained the wearers of petticoat and farthingale from stepping forth into the public ways, and wedging their not unsubstantial persons, if occasion were, into the throng nearest to the scaffold at an execution. Morally, as well as materially, there was a coarser fibre in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding, than in their fair descendants, separated from them by a series of six or seven generations; for, throughout that chain of ancestry, every successive mother has transmitted to her child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slighter physical frame, if not a character of less force and solidity, than her own. The women, who were now standing about the prison-door, stood within less than half a century of the period when the man-like Elizabeth bad been the not altogether unsuitable representative of the sex. They were her countrywomen; and the beef and ale of their native land, with a moral diet not a whit more refined, entered largely into their composition. The bright morning sun, therefore, shone on broad shoulders and well-developed busts, and on round and ruddy cheeks, that had ripened in the far-off island, and had hardly yet grown paler or thinner in the atmosphere of
New England. There was, moreover, a boldness and rotundity of speech among these matrons, as most of them seemed to be, that would startle us at the present day, whether in respect to its purport or its volume of tone.

"Goodwives", said a hard-featured dame of fifty, "I'll tell ye a piece of my mind. It would be greatly for the public behoof, if we women, being of mature age and church-members in good repute, should have the handling of such maufactresses as this Hester Prynne. What think ye, gossips? If the hussy stood up for judgment before us five, that are now here in a knot together, would she come off with such a sentence as the worshipful magistrates have awarded? Marry, I trow not!"

"People say", said another, "that the Reverend Master Dimmesdale, her godly pastor, takes it very grievously to heart that such a scandal should have come upon his congregation."

"The magistrates are God-fearing gentlemen, but merciful overmuch,-that is a truth," added a third autumnal matron. "At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester would have winced at that, I warrant me. But she,-the naughty baggage,-little will she care what they put upon the bodice of her gown! Why, look you, she may cover it with a brooch, or such like heathenish adornment, and so walk the streets as brave as ever!"

"Ah, but", interposed, more softly, a young wife, holding a child by the hand, "let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart."

"What do we talk of marks and brands, whether on the bodice of her gown, or the flesh of her forehead?" cried another female, the ugliest as well as the most pitiless of these self-constituted judges. "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates, who have made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray!"

"Mercy on us, goodwife", exclaimed a man in the crow, "is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows? That is the hardest word yet! Hush, now, gossips; for the lock is turning in the prison-door, and here comes Mistress Prynne herself."

The door of the jail being flung open from within, there appeared, in the first place, like a black shadow emerging into the sunshine, the grim and grisly presence of the town-beadle, with a sword by his side and his staff of office in his hand. This personage prefigured and represented in his aspect the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law, which it was his business to administer in its final and closest application to the offender. Stretching forth the official staff in his left had, he laid his right upon the shoulder of a young woman, whom
he thus drew forward; until, on the threshold of the prison-door, she repelled him, by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character, and stepped into the open air, as if by her own free-will. She bore in her arms a child, a baby of some three months old, who winked and turned aside its little face from the too vivid light of day; Because its existence, heretofore, had brought it acquainted only with the gray twilight of a dungeon, or other darksome apartment of the prison.

When the young woman—the mother of this child—stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fastened into her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbours. On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony.

The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance, on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and a face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was lady-like, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; characterized by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace, which is now recognized as its indication. And never had Hester Prynne appeared more lady-like, in the antique interpretation of the term, that as she issued from the prison. Those who had before known her, and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped. It may be true, that, to a sensitive observer, there was something exquisitely painful in it. Her attire, which, indeed, she had wrought for the occasion, in prison, and had modelled much after her own fancy, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity. But the point which drew all eyes, and, as it were, transfigured the wearer,—so that both men and women, who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne, were how impressed as if they beheld her for the first time,—was that SCARLET
LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and inclosing her in a sphere by herself.

“She hath good skill at her needle, that’s certain”, remarked one of the female spectators; “but did ever a woman, before this brazen hussy, contrive such a way of showing it! Why, gossips, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment?”

“It were well”, muttered the most iron-visaged of the old dames, “if we stripped Madam Hester’s rich gown off her dainty shoulders; and as for the red letter, which she hath stitched so curiously, I’ll bestow a rag of mine own rheumatic flannel, to make a fitter one!”

“O, peace, neighbours, peace!” whispered their youngest companion. “Do not let her hear you! Not a stitch in that embroidered letter, but she has felt it in her heart.”

The grim beadle now made a gesture with his staff.

“Make way, good people, make way, in the King’s name”, cried he. “Open a passage; and, I promise ye, Mistress Prynne shall be set where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight of her brave apparel, from this time till an hour past meridian. A blessing on the righteous Colony of the Massachusetts, where iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine! Come along, Madam Hester, and show your scarlet letter in the market-place!”

A lane was forthwith opened through the crowd of spectators. Preceded by the beadle, and attended by an irregular procession of stern-browed men and unkindly-visaged women, Hester Prynne set forth towards the place appointed for her punishment. A crowd of eager and curious schoolboys, understanding little of the matter in hand, except that it gave them a half-holiday, ran before her progress, turning their heads continually to stare into her face, and at the winking baby in her arms, and at the ignominious letter on her breast. It was no great distance, in those days, from the prison-door to the market-place. Measured by the prisoner’s experience, however, it might be reckoned a journey of some length; for, haughty as her demeanour was, she perchance underwent an agony from every footstep of those that thronged to see her, as if her heart had been flung into the street for them all to spurn and trample upon. In our nature, however, there is a provision, alike marvellous and merciful, that the sufferer should never know the intensity of what he endures by its present torture, but chiefly by the pang that rankles after it. With almost a serene deportment, therefore, Hester Prynne passed through this portion of her ordeal, and came to a sort of scaffold, at the western extremity of the market-place. It stood nearly beneath the eaves of Boston’s earliest church, and appeared to be a fixture there.