



The Scarlet Libretto

David Mason

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Words for Lori Laitman's opera, *The Scarlet Letter*

Based on the story by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Award-winning poet and librettist David Mason, author of *Ludlow* and other books, has given new life in verse to Hawthorne's classic novel. By distilling the book's narrative line and adding a charged lyricism of his own, Mason has created another magnificent work in his ongoing poetic portrait of America.

In old Boston, a young woman, Hester Prynne, has been charged with adultery and forced to wear the scarlet letter "A" embroidered on her breast. Just as she mounts the scaffold to receive her sentence, her husband, long presumed dead and newly escaped from captivity among the Indians, arrives and recognizes her. This man, renamed Roger Chillingworth, begins a quest to discover the father of Hester's child. As the community wrestles with whether or not to allow Hester to continue raising her daughter, Chillingworth moves in with the pale young minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, who hides the fact that he is the sought-after father. In a dark night of the soul, Arthur is taunted by a local witch, and it becomes clear that he is overcome with guilt and inner conflict about his past with Hester. The two lovers meet in the forest, plotting their escape, sure they can flee the laws and mores of men in this new world. But Dimmesdale cannot forget his guilt, and during an election day ceremony he confesses his sin to the crowd, exposing a branded letter "A" over his own heart.

A tale of conflict between an astonishing woman and her thwarted and thwarting community, of a minister's guilt and a husband's vengeance, Mason's *Scarlet Libretto* casts new light on Hawthorne's classic, on the tension between freedom and responsibility, and on the secrets in the human soul.

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