

## **A Reader's Guide to *Angel and Apostle***

### **About the Book**

At the end of Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, we know that Pearl, the elf-child daughter of Hester Prynne, is somewhere in Europe, comfortable, well set, and a mother herself now. But it could not have been easy for to arrive at such a place when she begins life as the bastard child of a woman publicly humiliated, again and again, in an unrelentingly judgmental Puritan world.

With a brilliant and authentic sense of that time and place, Deborah Noyes envisions the path Pearl takes to make herself whole and to carve her place in the New World.

Beautifully written with boundless compassion, *Angel and Apostle* is a heart rending and imaginative debut in which Noyes masterfully makes Hawthorne's character her own.

### **About the Author**

*Angel and Apostle* is Noyes' first novel. Her short fiction and reviews have appeared in *The Threepenny Review*, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, *Seventeen*, *The Washington Post Book World*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *Stories*, *The Miami Herald*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Bloomsbury Review*, *Boston Review*, and other publications. She has also written and edited numerous books for children and young adults, including the award winning teen anthology *Gothic! Ten Original Dark Tales*.

### **Questions for Thought and Discussion**

1. Pearl is the narrator of this novel, and she has a very distinctive voice. She tells the tale in a language full of authentic expressions and phrases from the period in which the novel is set. Does her voice enhance or detract from your enjoyment of the story? How?
2. Religion is the predominant force in Pearl's early life, yet she responds far more deeply to nature. Only in the woods, where the other children fear to go, does she feel safe. What does her affinity with nature add to your understanding of the story?
3. Stark historical settings provide the backdrop to this story: Puritan New England, the London of Cromwell and the Restoration. How do these historical times and places shape the way characters behave?
4. *Angel and Apostle* examines the relationship between mothers and daughters. In what ways does Pearl's life mirror her mother's? Does she ever realize this? To what extent does she manage to transcend her mother's experiences? Will Abigail ever manage to unpuzzle her own mother?
5. Pearl has been a friend of Simon's since childhood, and her letters show that they care deeply about one another. So why do you think she chooses to marry Nehemiah?

6. Pearl acts as Simon's eyes—yet in many ways he is far more perceptive than she. How would the story differ if told from his point of view?

7. Pearl is told many times throughout the novel that her father is the devil. To what extent does this foreshadow the truth about her father's identity?

8. Daniel Devlin gives Pearl a set of notebooks containing a “spidery, half familiar tale that was neither truth nor a lie”. What motivated him to write down a version of these events? How do you think Daniel Devlin's account might differ from Pearl's?

9. The letter A is significant throughout Pearl's story. What manifestations does it take? And how does each one impact on her?

10. This novel is a reimagining or alternative telling of Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic *The Scarlet Letter*. Did this affect how you read it? If you have read the original, how does this novel differ from it? Which qualities remain the same? If you haven't read it, does it inspire you to do so?

### **Suggested Reading**

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850); Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (1722); Emma Donoghue, *Slammerkin* (2001); Rose Tremain, *Restoration* (1989); Geraldine Brooks, *Year of Wonders* (2001); Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Tracy Chevalier,

*Girl With A Pearl Earring* (1999); Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women* (1997); Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (2000); Bruce C. Daniels, *Puritans at Play* (1995)