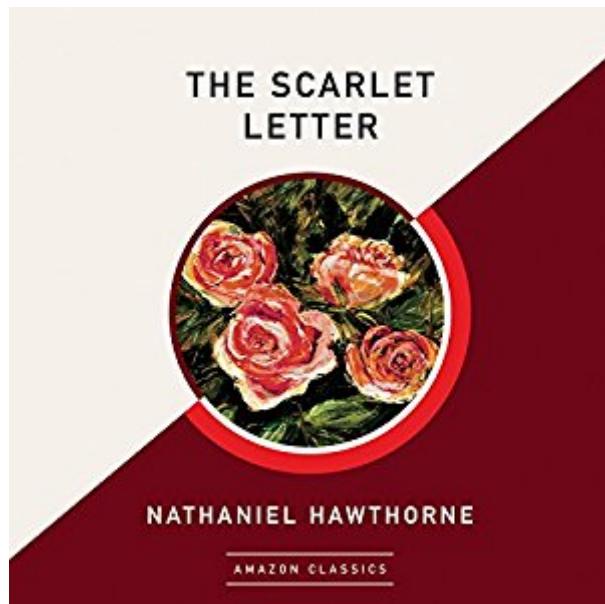


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# The Scarlet Letter



## **Synopsis**

The red letter A on her dress marks young mother Hester Prynne among her Puritan neighbors, who demand to know who fathered her child. Rumors swirl, but the shunned and shamed Hester keeps her secret - and his - for years, until a guilt-ridden confession reveals the truth, with unexpected consequences. Set in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, Hawthorne's masterwork was originally subtitled "a romance," though its themes include the limits of law, the power of religion, and the nature of sin. Equal parts tragic love story and social commentary, *The Scarlet Letter* brings to life the undying human need to keep secrets.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I decided to read this classic piece for personal reading since I never read it in high school. Hawthorne does a wonderful job on developing each character and it is interesting to see the dichotomies presented within them. I also recommend paying attention to the symbolic development of the scarlet letter itself. This writing has much to do with the battle of conformity, the idea of sin, the romance itself, and resulting consequences within a Puritan society. I appreciate Alesha N. Gates's review and recommendations, and the particular point to skip reading the introduction until the end. My little bit about viewing this from a feminist standpoint: I struggle to see this as a feminist work. However, I do see elements of feminism - male hegemony, emasculation and the resilience of the female characters. Still, I was never fully presented with female expectations contrasted against male expectations, i.e. the expectations that would be placed on the male characters in the novel.

Therefore, I cannot really say that Hester Prynne and Pearl had true feminist struggles or challenged societies thoughts about who a female should be. Instead, I see it as an upheaval of how society views humanity, whether male or female. Perhaps this work, written over one hundred years ago in 1850, really is a feminist work of literature and I'm just insensitive to a cautious approach towards it. Hester Prynne definitely is one of the most prominent female protagonists of this time and I loved the transformation she underwent to become a free thinker.

Ah, The Scarlet Letter, the book that sends collective grimaces and angry stares through the classrooms of high schools and colleges alike. Long before the days of Jerry Springer and the shock factor that was his show, there was Hester Prynne and that whole scaffold scene that opens up The Scarlet Letter. The Puritans were pretty riled up about this whole thing. I think The Scarlet Letter has been given a bad rap. I mean, I think collectively we tend to gravitate towards the negativity, gossip and scandal rather than looking the other way. And, Hawthorne was criticizing the masses and society of his time, in a way. We have become a society obsessed with negativity and sensationalism. Latest trends, headlines, gossip, media. It gives us the chance to voice and condemn others who have fallen (via an anonymous post through our keyboard or other device) and feel good about ourselves. Well, Hester Prynne and her adulterous affair (gasp) was that Puritan scandal in Hawthorne's day. Hawthorne takes a few jabs at the hypocrisies, just as we witness hypocrisies in our own actions today. In another way, I think The Scarlet Letter eloquently examines the nature of different kinds of sin through three different lens and points of view: Hester, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth. Each of these characters has a chance to "redeem" or change the sin that plagues them, either internally or externally, and is given that freedom, whether they choose to make amends or remain stagnant. Redemption is possible, if one so chooses. I get it, though. To call Hawthorne's prose complicated and difficult to wade through is a gross and negligent understatement. It's a bit of a challenge and you will have to spend some time slowing your reading down to get through some of the rather difficult prose. Yet, when you get past the diction and writing style, there is actually a pretty good story in here. Hawthorne loved him some symbolism, too, and we can see this through the various key scenes and places, most notably the scaffold where Hester is publicly shamed. I think that The Scarlet Letter is one of those novels where the sum is definitely bigger than its parts.

The Scarlet Letter was a re-read for members of our bookclub - as our Classic for April. While only

twelve members read and attended this month, it was a unanimous 5 stars for this classic novel that will forever be recognized as GREAT. Besides Nathaniel Hawthorne's envious symbolism ability, this is a work filled with all imaginable scandal cleverly written in old English. When we debated what tagline to use, the above barely beat "Heartbreaking and so lovely you will never forget it!" If you haven't read it, please do. The language is rough to comprehend in the beginning, but soon it wraps around you and you feel rewarded to the bone for having completed this masterpiece.

This is a work of literary art where mastery and craft of the English language is one central character. The story of a woman defamed and shamed by pious and powerful men in her life is sadly contemporary. We may not affix a scarlet letter for all to gawk at but social, or more accurately, antisocial media is the scaffold upon which public humiliation may be crafted and inflicted upon the innocent. A woman devotes her life to the service of her country and is drummed out to the chant of Lock her up.... Hester Prynne can feel her pain.

Of course, this is a classic piece of American literature. I had seen a dramatization of it on TV some years ago but until recently had not gotten around to reading it. The book is structured differently from the drama. Modern readers may find the sentences tryingly long and the sentiments unimaginable. However, clearly Hawthorne was a genius for he packs two or three reflections into every sentence and winds them about the characters flawlessly. If one can set aside modern concepts of behavior and Hemingway model sentence structure it is a rewarding read. The book deals intimately with internal conflicts in the characters rather than actions, which principally serve only to divulge thoughts and feelings.

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