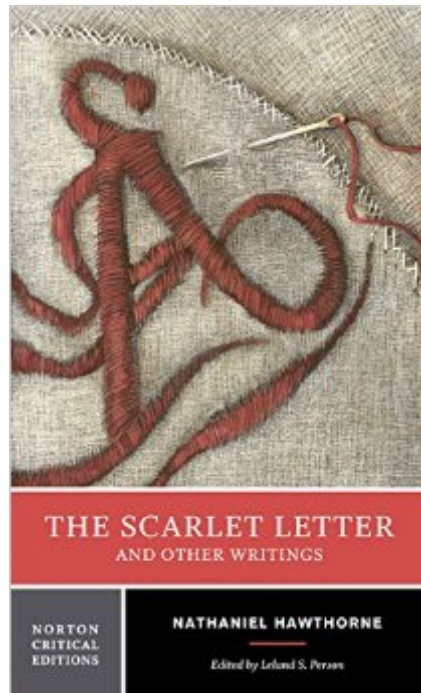


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# The Scarlet Letter And Other Writings (Norton Critical Editions)



## Synopsis

This Norton Critical Edition of Nathaniel Hawthorne's most widely read novel appears during the bicentennial anniversary year of his birth. The text of *The Scarlet Letter* is based on the 1850 third edition, the first set in stereotype plates and the basis of subsequent printings in Hawthorne's lifetime. An invaluable selection of contextual material includes five Hawthorne stories that are closely related to *The Scarlet Letter*, along with relevant letters and notebook entries. A substantial excerpt from Hawthorne's campaign biography of Franklin Pierce offers a revealing glimpse at Hawthorne's political thought, especially regarding slavery and abolition. "Criticism" provides a comprehensive overview of early and modern commentary on *The Scarlet Letter* and the stories in this edition, including nineteenth-century reviews of the novel and critical essays by Robert S. Levine, Nina Baym, Larry J. Reynolds, and Jean Fagan Yellin. A Chronology and Selected Bibliography are also included.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There are so many things I could say about this book, but should I reach the heights of elegance achieved only by Shakespeare, Hawthorne himself, or Faulkner, I could not overcome the horrible, terrible misconceptions most people have formed after having this beautiful novel foisted upon them in high school. Instead, I'll share a few observations and some tips for reading. First, this is a complicated story. It's not about evil Puritans and hero Hester, although you will read this point of

view in the cheat note summaries on the internet. It's not about feminism, really, nor is it about religion in any technical sense. The only comparison that really fits is that of love story, or love triangle, or maybe love square. (I told you it is complicated.) In all of literature, there are very few writers who have penned characters so incredibly real and well-rounded. When you finish the novel, you KNOW these people. Certainly there is some minor societal commentary, but the real story here is about these people. Now, I'm assuming that many people looking at this page have been told they must read this book for high school English. As a former teacher of said subject, I have some pointers. (1) Make sure you read the book for yourself. Chances are (in our current educational system) your teacher is going to have a flat interpretation of this book, likely gleaned from some ready-made teaching packet. (If you have another kind of teacher, consider yourself lucky.) You can have some very interesting class discussions if you actually read the material and challenge some of the majority opinions about the novel. Be a rebel. Have some fun in English. (2) Read \*The Custom House\* introduction, but wait until after you've finished the book.

Like many reviewers here, I was "forced" to read this book for my English Composition class. However, unlike many reviewers here, I have a much different view of the story. As some people have said before, Hawthorne's book takes a good deal of concentration, effort, and strength to understand. Not only to understand, but to finish. The story can drag sometimes, it is true, and Hawthorne's style of writing occasionally leaves something to be desired (I don't think I've ever seen that many commas, 15 letter words, or page long paragraphs before), but we simply must look past these minor issues. Overall, the plot is highly creative and intense, despite the writing. \Ok, ok, I agree that the first chapter, "The Custom-House", was pretty bad. In fact, it was so bad and boring that I drifted off to sleep several times while reading it! The first chapter has little relevancy with the story, so, unless you have to, I would suggest skipping that part of the text. The rest is exceptionally good, and the quality of the plot cannot be overlooked. My advice is to just lay off the first chapter; that way you'll be able to enjoy the rest of the book without difficulty. The story itself deals with sin and adultery, a subject that isn't very popular right now. Hawthorne does an excellent job of telling us about this, but he leaves the reader with many questions floating around in his mind at the conclusion. At the end of the story you're not 100% sure if Hawthorne was condemning the Puritan society, or if he was commending it. He leaves that for the reader to figure out, which is a thing authors seldom do. That's a major reason I believe this work is so unique and timeless.

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