



# The Scarlet Letter (Wisehouse Classics Edition)

*Nathaniel Hawthorne*

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*THE SCARLET LETTER* is an 1850 work of fiction in a historical setting, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and is considered to be his best work. Set in 17th-century Puritan Boston, Massachusetts, during the years 1642 to 1649, it tells the story of Hester Prynne, who conceives a daughter through an affair and struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. Throughout the book, Hawthorne explores themes of legalism, sin, and guilt.

20th-century writer D. H. Lawrence said that there could not be a more perfect work of the American imagination than *The Scarlet Letter*. Henry James once said of the novel, "It is beautiful, admirable, extraordinary; it has in the highest degree that merit which I have spoken of as the mark of Hawthorne's best things—an indefinable purity and lightness of conception...One can often return to it; it supports familiarity and has the inexhaustible charm and mystery of great works of art."

The book's immediate and lasting success are due to the way it addresses spiritual and moral issues from a uniquely American standpoint. In 1850, adultery was an extremely risqué subject, but because Hawthorne had the support of the New England literary establishment, it passed easily into the realm of appropriate reading. It has been said that this work represents the height of Hawthorne's literary genius, dense with terse descriptions. It remains relevant for its philosophical and psychological depth, and continues to be read as a classic tale on a universal theme.

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