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Nathaniel Hawthorne

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The Scarlet Letter is an 1850 romantic work of fiction in a historical setting, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. It is considered to be his magnum opus. 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 adulterous affair and struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. Throughout the book, Hawthorne explores themes of legalism, sin, and guilt.

[In popular culture]

The Scarlet Letter has been adapted to numerous films, plays and operas and remains frequently referenced in modern popular culture. The Scarlet Letter was also the basis for the 2010 film *Easy A*, the story of Olive Penderghast (Emma Stone) who experiences the same isolation Hester Prynne undergoes in the novel, but in a reversed way. In the film, she was originally singled out for being the only virgin girl on campus, and becomes popular after she tells the school that she had sex with a homosexual male classmate, who was also picked on for his sexuality. The plot of the novel *The Brooklyn Follies* by Paul Auster revolves around the manuscript of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, American novelist and essayist, was born on July 4, 1804, at Salem, Massachusetts. His father, a master mariner, died early, and the boy grew up in a lonely country life with his mother. He graduated at Bowdoin College, but his literary impulse had already declared itself, and he retired to Salem to write, unsuccessfully for many years. Later he held subordinate official positions in the custom-house at Salem, and lived for a few months in the Brook Farm socialistic community. Severing his connection with the Civil Service in 1841, it was Nathaniel Hawthorne's intention to devote himself entirely to literature. In this he was unsuccessful, and in a short while was forced to accept a position in the custom-house again, this time as surveyor in his native town of Salem. It was during this period he wrote "*The Scarlet Letter*," published in 1850, which immediately brought him fame, and still remains the most popular of his novels. Hawthorne himself has described how the story came to be written. The discovery of an old manuscript by a former surveyor, and a rag of scarlet cloth, which, on careful examination, assumed the shape of a letter--the capital A--gave a reasonably complete explanation of the whole affair of "one Hester Prynne, who appeared to have been rather a noteworthy personage in the view of our ancestors." Nathaniel Hawthorne died on May 18, 1864.

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