

# Self and other: the scarlet letter

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



With his critical essay: " Hawthorne's Awakening in the Customhouse" Loving gives the reader a psychoanalytical reading of *The Scarlet Letter*. Loving pays close attention to Hawthorne's unconscious motives and feelings in his interpretation of Hawthorne's writing. He is particularly concerned about the radical change of direction that Hawthorne takes in altering the initial course of his story by adding an unexpected ending. The ending, as presented to the reader in the last three chapters, undermines the notion of emancipation Hawthorne had developed throughout the story. Loving argues that Hawthorne withheld in this way a significant piece of information which would have enlightened the reader about Hawthorne's true self: " The author's last minute retreat from the primordial sense of himself in *The Scarlet Letter* may have preserved his sanity to some extent (...) but it also cost him (and us) the true ending of the novel". (Loving, p. 23) Loving considers the novel as a highly autobiographical account in which Hawthorne unconsciously attempts to first and foremost resolve his relationship with his mother. Central to the understanding of the nature of this relationship are the recurring themes of " guilt" and " crime". The " guilt" Hawthorne suffers from is derived from the " crime" of having broken the bond with his mother by secretly getting engaged to Sophia. In the process of writing *The Scarlet Letter*, he uncovered his unnaturally close and dependent relationship to his mother from which his sense of guilt originally derived. Since he did not want this sense of guilt to be revealed to the reader, he added " *The Customhouse*" to shift the focus of the origin of his guilt onto his ancestors. According to Hawthorne, " *The Customhouse*" was written to increase the overall length of *The Scarlet Letter*. Loving however, claims " *The*

Customhouse" to be a cover-up for Hawthorne's deep identity crisis: " He desperately needed a beginning (...) that would save him from the self he had revealed in the true text" (Loving, p. 24). By adding " The Customhouse" after he had written the body of The Scarlet Letter he retained his sense of identity which would otherwise have fallen apart by having to face the suppressed conflict with his mother. In Loving's words: " Hawthorne realised all too well before the end where the ' sketch' was taking him (...) [and it was therefore that] he had to revive his former or social sense of himself by immersing himself in " the Customhouse" sketch" (Loving, p. 22).