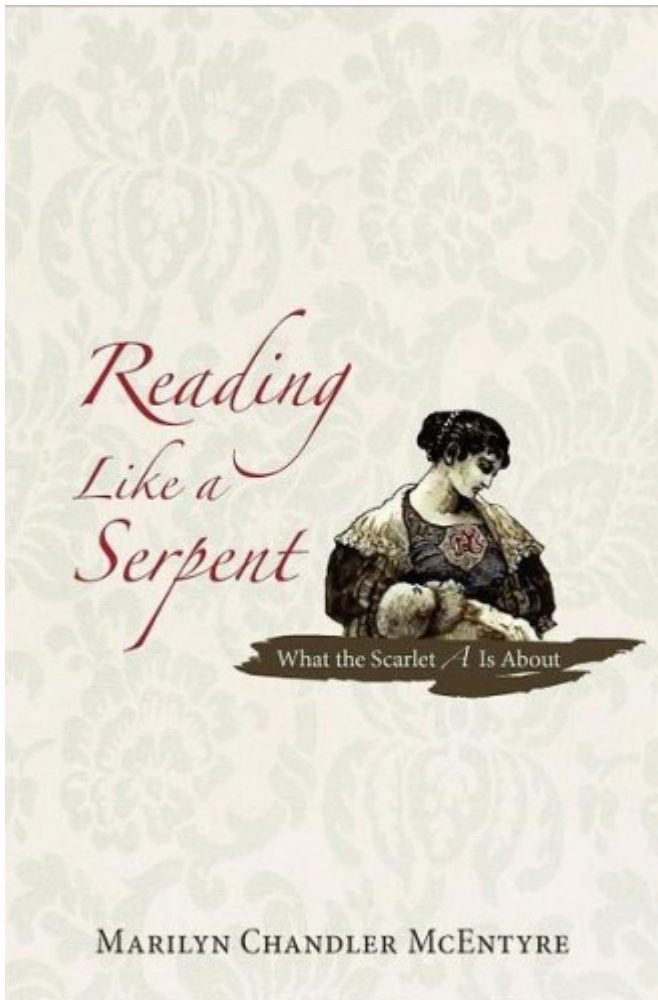


Reading Like a Serpent, by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre

Books in the [August 22, 2012](#) issue

In Review



Reading Like a Serpent

By Marilyn Chandler McEntyre
Cascade Books

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is one of McEntyre's favorite books. She has spent a lifetime defending it to students and friends who remember it as a stuffy high school homework assignment. In this reflection on the classic, she argues that

the novel is less about the sin of adultery than the possibly tragic consequences of misinterpreting the Bible's moral message. The Puritans who serve as characters in the book as well as the Puritans who were the book's original audience suffered from lack of self-reflection, and McEntyre argues that this was the focus of Hawthorne's novel. His challenge to the reader was to read the Bible more responsibly and with a sharper eye—the kind of reading that McEntyre gives to *The Scarlet Letter*.