



## ABSTRACT

“Elements of Contrast in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s, The Scarlet Letter,” is a work, which indicates different aspects of the novel itself. In the first place, we analyzed the type of novel to show that it is not just a Romance story but a Historical one as well.

Aside from this, it has extraordinary elements that make it really interesting and amazing. Moreover, each contrast shows how skillful Hawthorne was with every detail.

Another topic developed is the different moral beliefs that existed within Puritanism as well as Hawthorne’s own thoughts and ideas. Puritans had different rules that made their town appear, to themselves, unique and blessed. Their religion was linked to their politics and laws because they wanted to create a life where they could avoid everything they did not like from the Old World.

Additionally, the entire story is focused on the Puritan treatment of females, including the changes Hester undergoes during the novel; the Puritan women versus the modern women; the way Hawthorne’s thoughts about women, and the different conceptions of love and sex according to Puritans in contrast to those of modern people. Perhaps the reason Nathaniel Hawthorne presented new ideas about women was that he was surrounded by females; and he admired them and saw them in a totally different way the way they were thought of before his time.

In conclusion, The Scarlet Letter can be considered a Historical Romance novel, which among other aspects, gives the reader an idea of how hard Puritan times, was.



## **KEYWORDS**

Nathaniel Hawthorne Scarlet Letter Contrast Puritan Woman Women Hester  
Prynne Sex Arthur Dimmesdale Roger Chillingworth Sun Moon Darkness Light  
Natural Supernatural Civilization Wilderness Guilt Identity Society Sin Religion  
Moral Females Love



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ELEMENTS OF CONTRAST IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S THE SCARLET  
LETTER

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the amazing and special people in our lives, such as our dear mothers, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, and cousins who have contributed, helped, and supported us to accomplish this work.



## INTRODUCTION

Nathaniel Hawthorne is one of the most important writers in English Literature, and he was recognized as such after the publishing of his great novel, The Scarlet Letter. The novel was perfectly developed in twenty-four chapters plus an introduction to the story named “The Custom House.” This thesis is based on the elements of contrast that exist in the different chapters all during the novel.

The first element of contrast to be introduced is the type of novel The Scarlet Letter is. People have said it is a Romance novel, and it seems the author was trying to convince the reader that the novel was of the Romance type, not just with examples, but with his own words. In “The Custom House,” Hawthorne claims he wrote a Romance novel and he was convinced of it; however, maybe he did not realize that all the historical elements he was using in his novel, make the reader believe it was more than merely a Romance type of novel. It was also a historical novel. Many critics are convinced that the novel is historical because it possesses the different characteristics of a novel of this kind.

Aside from this, Hawthorne’s writing is focused on some other image clusters that center on contrasts. Contrasts are evident all during the story. Those are used over and over during the story, and the technique gives the perfect seasoning to the novel. Almost all the story is based on the dark side of human behavior and thoughts as against the light of nature. These two sides are found in different scenes and characters; however, it depends on how the reader inter-



prets the light or the dark elements. It is possible to interpret the light and dark elements according to the effect they have on the reader.

Another kind of contrast in this novel is with respect to natural versus supernatural elements. Different elements found in the story offer a vision of this kind of contrast showing how skillful Hawthorne was as a writer. The use of natural characteristics of the world against the unnatural and supernatural features created by human people is an interesting element of the novel.

With respect to natural versus supernatural elements, some scenes are focused on the sun and the moon. Most of the scenes related to these lights center on Hester, Pearl, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth. One more time, Hawthorne uses skillful detailing to make the novel more interesting and unforgettable. These and other elements will be discussed in Chapter Two.

The reader realizes immediately that no matter what the contrasts presented tell the reader, all the scenes have a Puritan influence. Hawthorne gives us a clear view of the harshness of Puritan hearts, laws, and beliefs. While reading the novel, it is possible to see how religious the people were, and how they used their faith and religion to commit terrible crimes in the name of God. Moreover, Puritan morals were connected with their religion and the way they behaved in those days. These details are part of the novel which is a global view of Hawthorne's predecessors.



Another contrast is presented in the way the Puritans used to treat women as compared to the way society treats women now. As was already said, Puritans acted according to their religion and morals, and that is why they treated females in a different way from later times. In the story, it is possible to imagine how chauvinistic they were to condemn a woman and forgive a man for the same crime. Furthermore, Hester's character in the beginning is contrasted with her attitude at the end of the story to show how she was influenced by the townspeople of the period.

Concerning the evolution of Hester's character, it is also pertinent to think about the contrast between Puritan women and modern females. Is there any difference between them? The answer, of course, is affirmative. Everything in life changes with time and there appear differences between women over the ages. However, in the story Hawthorne's own perspective about women is evident. Is it a positive or negative perspective? The answer will be clear later on.

Another contrasting theme found is the concept Puritans had with respect to love and sex; Puritans used to have an opposite idea of love and sex from what is accepted nowadays.



## CHAPTER 1: CONTRAST IN THE TYPE OF NOVEL

As was already said, Nathaniel Hawthorne was very inspired by and interested in literature from the time he was a boy. After producing a few pieces of writing, he wrote his masterpiece based on a piece of cloth embroidered with the infamous letter 'A.' That is why many people believe this story was based upon true facts and events; nevertheless, there are others who think the story was simply invented by Hawthorne.

The Scarlet Letter was officially published in 1850. At first, it was not greatly popular or important, and it wasn't until a few years later that it gained the attention it deserved. The author was excited and very proud of his work, and he had the security of knowing he had written a great novel that surely would become iconic and famous. Hawthorne must have been confident that his story would eventually attract the public eye.

In "The Custom House", Hawthorne expressed he felt he had lost his true calling because he was not writing at the time. He said that it is necessary to get into the story and imagine telling it to a friend, as if it were one's own. That is the way in which everyone can get involved in a great story with a perfect plot and characters.

After finding a piece of fabric, in the Custom House, inside a package, and after reading the story regarding the cloth on a piece of paper attached to it, Haw-



thorne felt the necessity of sharing the findings which had been stored away for many long years. Be that as it may, because of his creative energy Hawthorne gave literature a great book. Each scene, each description, each character is so well developed that the reader is amazed at the author's imagination, details, and mastery of words.

After reading the novel, it would seem that the reader must consider it a great historical novel, but on what basis? On the next pages there is a discussion of the novel in a deeper way to consider the reasons why it could be considered a historical novel instead of a romance. However, it is necessary to determine whether the story is a historical novel or a romance.

### 1.1 The Historical Novel

"A novel that has as its setting a period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity (which is in some cases only apparent fidelity) to historical fact. The work may deal with actual historical personages...or it may contain a mixture of fictional and historical characters." ("Historical novel")

Although The Scarlet Letter does not offer an exact format of a historical novel, it does present a plot which could be a beautiful historical novel. The following



pages detail various descriptions that Hawthorne makes of the Puritans to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of the Puritanical age of the past.

In Hawthorne's comments on The Customs House, at the beginning of the novel, he gives us a brief description of the place where he worked. He explains that it had formerly been a very active wharf; however, at the time he narrated the story, The Customs House was bordered by some wooden warehouses. The place was no longer as active as it had been in the Old King Derby days.

Hawthorne's comments on The Customs House are full of descriptions of the life and people of the Puritan times. Hawthorne describes the harbor laced with vibrancy and actual commercial exchange; he even comments on how the status of his co-workers was reflected in the way they spent their money to enjoy life.

Further on in The Scarlet Letter, now getting into the actual story, there are descriptions of the clothes people wore which were "sad colored" and "gray". The Puritans were known for their rejection of anything colorful and frivolous. They were serious and somber people. Hawthorne tells us about the first two institutions the Puritans created in town, which were a cemetery and a prison which according to the Puritans were absolutely necessary for a new town or colony since there had to be a place to bury people, and a place to keep criminals.



The narrator indicates how the prison door looked. The ugly aspect of it is described and the iron fixtures on it infer the torture and oppression that prisoners suffered from the people of the town, who were extremely religious and moral.

The fact that the first settlers of the Massachusetts colony built a prison right away also denotes how Puritans used to think about life. Obviously, they were looking for a perfect existence without crime or sin; thus, nobody could deviate from their rigidly set principles. The Puritans tried to control their life and to avoid committing the same sins as seen in the ways of the Old World. The Puritan outlook was one of darkness, oppression, and gloom; these were the characteristics of the people of Boston who really yearned for the perfect place to live; a place with perfect laws and perfect people. Of course, in the search for this utopia, they turned everything into a nightmare for some of them, and for most of them only into an impossible dream. In their desire to get the improvements for a better life for them, they apparently became the judges of their own lives and turned everything that the New World offered into darkness.

As the novel progresses, Hawthorne explains that the story happened two centuries before his time. At first, all the details set forth have a somber nature, demonstrating the collective character of the Puritans. The author talks about Puritan beliefs and the severe outlook of the Puritans during that period of time.

According to the novel, the Puritan people who lived in Boston at that time had “petrified” faces with “grim rigidity”. Through these, and other descriptions already pointed out, Hawthorne explains how severe the earliest Puritans were,





and what an inflexible attitude they had. It is evident that times were hard. The people were close-minded; they were what their faces reflected. Such characteristics perfectly emphasize the Puritan character and the Puritan sense of discipline. Hawthorne has presented a great image of the behavior of the people and their acting in life according to their rules, including their way of punishing sinners.

Their drive for perfect obedience to laws also made them unable to feel any kind of compassion for anyone who broke their legal code. Above all, Puritans believed that any person, who broke their rules and laws had sinned against God.

After detailed descriptions of the people standing outside the prison door, Hawthorne focuses on a specific group, the women of the town. He narrates that there were many women who were extremely interested in the fate of the judged person who was going to come out of the prison.

Moreover, Hawthorne paints these women as morally and physically strong. He tells us that the women were actually stronger than the women of his day, and they had much more character than the women of his time of the 1850s.

The conversation among these women reveals a great deal about their thoughts and beliefs. They seem to feel morally superior to Hester, and that is why they thought they could condemn her actions, or anybody else's for that matter. Maybe the reason they judged her so was because Hester's sins could



have led to a general consensus about every woman being as sinfully passionate and light-headed as Hester; making every woman appear suspicious in town.

Before Hester appears in front of the crowd, another representation of Puritan legal authority emerges as the town's religious sheriff; his description as a kind of "black shadow", "grim and grisly" emphasizes the dark side and the severity of Puritan punishment, one more time.

In addition, the narrator gives us a glimpse of the kind of machinery Puritans used to punish people at that time, the pillory and the scaffold.

What was the pillory? And what was the scaffold?

The pillory was "A wooden framework with holes for the head and hands, in which offenders were formerly locked to be exposed to public scorn as punishment."("pillory")

The scaffold is "an elevated platform on which a criminal is executed, usually by hanging."("scaffold")



These instruments made of wood and iron were the implements to punish every person who was against Puritan rules. The text explains that the criminal could not hide his head in shame because the head was confined by the pillory. Both the scaffold and the pillory placed the criminals in a position of shame and dishonor. These instruments of punishment were part of the history of the Puritan town and group, and therefore were very important in the daily life of the Puritans.

After Hester appeared in front of the crowd, the scarlet letter she had embroidered on her dress, on the front, placed a kind of spell on the people. Since Hester was a free thinker and could not conform completely to Puritan rules, she was linked with people who were accused of witchcraft (maybe because of their nonconformity.)

In Puritan times, as the novel suggests, death was the punishment for any man or woman who committed adultery. This revelation indicates how cruel the society was. If Hester had revealed Arthur Dimmesdale's name as the father of her baby, both of them, Hester and Arthur, would have been executed.

In the story Puritan people had idealistic ideas about the ministers of their church. They saw Arthur as "simple and childlike", with an angelic "dewy purity of thought." Besides they believed their religious leaders were perfect and that they were sent from heaven to Earth.



Hawthorne has shown us that Puritans were severe, cruel, obsessed with religion, chauvinistic, physically stout, and grim-faced.

Through his words in the chapter titled, "The Interview", Hawthorne tells us about the relationship between Hester and Roger. They are married, but they seem very different. Physically Roger is just the opposite of Hester. He is not an attractive man, whereas she is very beautiful. Why did they get married? One reason could be that they married for convenience. In those times people used to get married because the parents of the bride would often choose the husband for their daughter. As the narrator says, Roger just wanted to have "a household fire" in his life. He perhaps did not love Hester; he only saw her as company for him and as the mother for his children. Many marriages were arranged in this way, for convenience.

Just as in previous chapters, "Hester and the Needle" (Chapter 5) describes what a sinner had to suffer because of his/her mistakes. Hawthorne pointed out that everyone who belonged to the Puritan society had the right to judge, criticize, and condemn any person who broke the rules and laws of God. According to the story, Hester was extremely humiliated by the townspeople who refused to forgive her and forget her sin. Children were also cruel to her and Pearl. The children were indoctrinated with the beliefs of their elders, and they were allowed to be cruel to people in the colony who were considered to be sinners.



The ministers in the church used Hester as the subject for their speeches. They pointed to her as the symbol of sin, and as the example of what the rest of the town should not do in life.

Witchcraft is presented in a clear way in the chapter called, “The Elf-child and the Minister”. After leaving the governor’s mansion, Hester was invited to be part of a meeting. This meeting was in the woods with witches from town. Mistress Hibbins asked Hester to come with her and participate. The author reveals that witchcraft existed in Boston, and that the Puritans firmly believed in the spells, magic, and evil which were against God and his laws. The Puritan people punished witches severely. If Puritans treated a woman who was pregnant in such a way, how would they treat people who they believed were worshippers of Satan? The punishments were terrible and grim to the extreme. Witchcraft was part of the history of the Puritans and a part of their daily effort to combat all forms of what they considered to be evil.

There are many examples of Puritan society in the novel. The story gives us a clear idea of Puritan laws and ways of thinking and acting in all situations which were against their sense of perfection in the search for a perfect life. Therefore, the novel could be considered to be a historical novel.

## 1.2 Romance

Before deciding whether or not The Scarlet Letter is a novel of the category of Romance Literature, it is necessary to talk about the Romance Novel.



“A good romance novel has, at its base, a conflict or challenge that must be overcome by either hero or heroine, and it's getting there that's half the fun.

Most popular romance writers know how to craft a novel that incorporates action, character building, suspense, mystery, and yes, even a little sex or a lot, but that depends on personal taste. A romance novel can be filled with hot and steamy scenes or gentle persuasions that cause readers to fall in love with heroes while the heroine stumbles around, blind as a bat, to all his good qualities. On the other hand, many a novel heroine waits impatiently for the hero to get it through his thick, stubborn head that she loves him. Women don't typically play weak roles, but often offer the main male lead more than they can handle. Oftentimes, it is nothing more than a battle of wits between male and female leads who are desperately fighting their attraction to one another.”(Jedediah “What Is A Romance Novel”)

It seems there are portions of romance novels in other genres of literature. For example, science fiction can have portions of romance. It could be that The Scarlet Letter is a historical romance novel. Moreover, the Romance novel has characteristics, such as “a return to nature, and also it values the imagination over reason and emotion over intellect...” (Taormina “The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Novel”)



and some romantic literature even puts “emphasis on tales of horror and the supernatural.”

A case can be made for The Scarlet Letter to be considered a Romance novel. Concerning the story, In “The Custom House” Hawthorne explains what is needed to create a real romance. He says the perfect place to write a perfect romance novel is in a familiar room during the evening. He also talks about the moonlight effect which makes visible every object in that place, and says that real and imaginary things interact. (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 65-66)

According to Hawthorne’s explanation, it is possible to say all these characteristics create a romance. Although he does not narrate a story between two people falling in love or tell the truths of the heart of any person, yet he shows us the components of a romance by presenting some elements of this kind of novel.

The novel has the characteristics of Romance literature from the beginning when Hawthorne introduces the story with a perfect air of authenticity. He says he found a piece of cloth. As he keeps relating the story, he mixes his account with historical facts trying to give the novel a touch of authenticity. This mixture gives a perfect and natural element to a romance by linking history and romance. This account comes from the Introduction to The Scarlet Letter.

Furthermore, the description of Hester as the heroine of a romance novel is in line with the standard of that type of writing. She is described as a beautiful



woman, strong, elegant, and intelligent. Hawthorne also says the letter A on Hester's chest has a supernatural effect on people; it puts a kind of spell on others.

Moreover, Hester herself is a romantic element in the novel. She shows the real nature of human beings trying to be happy with a person who makes her happy no matter what. She is able to love and feel alive again. This is human nature; the desire of finding someone who can be close by giving the reader the security needed and wanted in everyday life. Aside from love, Hester is also an example of the human condition in a common way; everyone makes mistakes. No one in the entire world is perfect or can say she/he has not made mistakes. We have the right to be wrong from time to time and the most important factor is to admit our mistakes and try to be better.

In contrast to Hester, Hawthorne describes Puritans as cruel, grim, grisly, and severe by the descriptions of their clothes, their ways of punishment, and the conversation among the women outside of the prison. They are the perfect antagonists in a romance in which two people fight for their love. Of course this story is not just a love story, but the romantic theme typical of a romance novel. Hawthorne uses negative adjectives to describe the Puritans. He shows the opposite of the beauty of nature, the black side of light, darkness. Of course, the romantic element here is his extraordinary manner of description that makes us despise the emotions that Puritans had in relation to their absurd laws and thoughts.





Furthermore, Pearl is the perfect example of love. She is the result of the love between Hester and Arthur despite all the anger and hatred of the community. Besides, she represents the truth of her parents' hearts; the nature of having a great feeling and finding the most beautiful feeling of nature, LOVE, by the people who created her.

Aside from what Pearl symbolizes, the supernatural is another element of romanticism. When Arthur is on the platform, a meteor appears in the sky. It is necessary to say this is a kind of symbolism, just like almost everything else in the novel. All the symbolism is linked with romance elements. These elements will be seen later.

Other examples of romance are found within the main concepts of the novel. The concepts of sin and guilt are shown by Hester and Arthur for living a prohibited love. Both of the characters are compromised. On the one hand Hester is married and has a commitment with Roger who is far from her. On the other hand, Arthur has a compromise with the church and God; he is supposed to serve God and not sin, not have a relationship with any woman outside of marriage. Sin and guilt are in the themes of the novel throughout the whole story of love between Hester and Arthur.

There is some madness in one character of the book, Roger Chillingworth. This is shown when Roger tries to get revenge on Reverend Dimmesdale. He loses his mind. He acts completely irrationally when he starts to manipulate the Rev-



erend. He focuses himself on Arthur's mind, trying to make Arthur feel more and more depressed and guilty, thereby destroying him in that way.

Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale became somewhat crazy, too. He started to punish and torture himself every night, and tried to bring some peace to his life. His madness was so serious that he started to become sick, weak, and thin. All his regrets, instigated by Roger's revenge, were killing him.

Moreover other elements or concepts can be found in the text of good and evil. The text raises many questions. Does Hester deserve to pay for her guilt alone? Does Arthur have to be punished and reveal his hidden guilt? Is it really a sin to feel love for someone who you are fond of? Was Hester right in not revealing her child's father? Was it right to be punished alone? Was it right to suffer all she went through to cover a weak man? All romance novels try to persuade the reader to find the answer to questions such as these.

Nathaniel Hawthorne also emphasizes the importance of trying to break free from the Puritan rules and doctrines that had been established in England. Although Hester broke rules, she was still considered to be a good person, due to her good deeds, because beyond being sorry for her sin, she treated everyone kindly in spite of the fact that they were mean to her. Moreover, she proved wise enough not to sin again.

In conclusion, it can clearly be said that The Scarlet Letter is a historical novel. The Scarlet Letter narrates some Puritan history and places the plot in a specif-



ic time in history. The novel is also of the romantic genre. It tells of a forbidden love between two people who were supposed to keep their promises to others. Therefore, the novel contains characteristics of both kinds of novels, Historical and Romantic. In this way, there is a contrast in the book between the Historical, true past, and the Romantic, fictional element that exists in the story.



## CHAPTER 2: CONTRASTS IN HAWTHORNE'S WRITING STYLE

Hawthorne showed his great literary skill in his descriptions throughout the novel. He also established a perfect plot with all the characteristics of a romance. Because of his style it is easy to imagine and appreciate all the history that is brought to mind. Hawthorne even described the Custom house, the prison door, Hester's House, and the rest of the settings and surroundings, to help the reader get involved more and more in the story.

The author also made great use of his imagination and mastery of words, throughout the novel; he presented contrasting elements, such as white and black, light and dark, and so on. He contrasted everything he could in the novel. Moreover, he tried to give meaning to each element in his work. People, events, and ideas are linked together through symbolism.

Aside from all the details, and deeper meanings of the novel, Hawthorne uses a formal style of writing. He even used this type of writing when Pearl conversed with her mother and father. Although the speech may seem too formal for the reader, Hawthorne was able to use it as a tool to describe each human emotion of the characters.

Furthermore, the author focused on the characters' inner feelings and the struggle within themselves. That is why he did not concentrate on confrontations between the characters. He preferred to exploit the human psyche



through a study of the dark side of human consciousness. This gives the novel a really interesting point of view and catches the attention of the reader even more.

Another characteristic of Hawthorne's style is the very developed concept of neutral territory. He placed this territory in the place where the real and actual world meets and interacts with the imaginary or fairy-land world. This neutral territory can be seen in The Custom House where the entire novel starts taking place.

The use of symbolism has made The Scarlet Letter different from other conservative novels of the nineteenth century. Symbols give a touch of modernity to the novel. In the following pages, some of most important dichotomies will be analyzed.

## 2.1 Darkness versus Light

As was said before, there is a great deal of symbolism in the novel. Hawthorne gave a special meaning to some objects or behaviors; however, he gave the reader the opportunity to understand them in different ways and as he/she might wish.

On the one hand, the forest is humanity's dark symbol for Puritans because it is unknown to them. It has an evil side, and it is linked with Satan. On the other



hand, the same forest means creativity and imagination for Hester and her daughter.

It can be said that there is a kind of reverse meaning associated with light and darkness. For example, the use of light to symbolize sin and evil is evident in the novel. The scarlet letter embroidered on Hester's chest shines and is the only thing that lights up Hester's clothing. At first the letter A represented only "Adulteress", but later it was used as a symbol of sin, and Hester considered it as a punishment for what she had done. So in this way, the light of the scarlet letter represents evil, sin, and adultery and not goodness and kindness as it could be expected to represent.

Furthermore, in literature red is used to represent passion, lust, and sin; and Hester's A turns out to be of the scarlet color, which could be linked to crimson, one of the most beautiful tones of red; nevertheless, it still has a perverse meaning for the townspeople.

Another example of this reverse meaning and symbolism is Hester's hair. It is presented as so shiny and glossy that it can be compared to the sun's radiance. The description of this kind of "light" belongs to a woman who has committed a terrible sin. She is an adulteress and a sinner to the Puritans; so once again light represents evil.

If this connotation is carried on all during the novel, it might be perceived clearly that little Pearl is another example of this kind of light. The girl is described just



like her mother as a child who is really beautiful and is a bright flame wherever she is. Furthermore, she was her mother's scarlet letter in person. She was the daughter of two adulterers, she was born from their sin, and she was the product of what was forbidden.

Roger Chillingworth's eyes also "light up" in Chapter Ten.

"The Puritan system was selfish and brutal, merely; Chillingworth's was satanically malignant; but both alike are impotent to do anything but inflame the evils they pretend to assuage." (J. Hawthorne "The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne" 2)

The author says Roger's eyes were kind of blue and grim just like the light of fire in the reign of the Black man, Satan. Although he had a light in his eyes, it was not a good light; it was just an evil light that seemed to emanate from hell. So maybe his anger and feelings were so strong that they came all over him and turned him into Satan in person.

In Chapter Twelve when Dimmesdale is standing on the scaffold along with Hester and Pearl, a meteor shows up in the sky. The light of the meteor leads every person to understand it in different ways. In this case, the light, according to Dimmesdale, is connected to the scarlet letter on his own chest and shows the deep link among the three of them: Arthur, Hester and Roger. It shows to



the world that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father, pointing to him as the sinner who broke the town's rules and sinned against God.

Now it is necessary to show what darkness symbolizes. For example, Pearl tried to hide her head from the sunlight and her mother tried to hide the letter after leaving the prison. This action was described to reveal Hester's feeling of weakness and sin when she had to stand before the townspeople.

When Hawthorne said the "darkened house" was the only place which could tame Hester, he expressed that she was being redeemed by goodness and truth. Hester changed and tried not to sin anymore and that was why she was forgiven by the people of the town.

Although there is a reversal of the traditional meanings of light and good, and darkness as evil in the novel, for the most part these standard interpretations of light and darkness are also prevalent in the book.

Pearl said to her mother that the sun did not love her because it hid from her. Although Hester tried to place Pearl where the sunlight was, it faded away. If this situation is analyzed, it can be said that light could represent all the purity Hester needed to have in her life. It could mean that she wanted to repent and be forgiven for her sin, but she had not been enlightened yet as to how to do that.





The disappearance of light in the scene could symbolize all the problems and circumstances Hester had to confront because of the townspeople's cruelty. When the light disappeared, it seemed to represent the refusal of the people, and even God, to forgive and accept Hester as a normal member of the town. She only wanted to go to her house to rest; this could mean her acceptance of not being accepted by the townspeople and her resignation to her situation.

Another example of this symbolic use of light occurs when Hawthorne says the sun was shining upon Pearl outside her house despite the fact that Pearl was in the forest and her mother was inside the house. This could mean that she was the light in all of Hester's black life. It could mean that Pearl was Hester's reason to move on and be a better woman.

Another example of dark is present when Hester and Arthur were talking about themselves, and their plans (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 200). When they were in the middle of the forest, it seemed that a storm was coming. However, if this is analyzed, all the shadows and weird weather could mean that they could not really walk away from all their problems and difficulties because they were under the shadow of that sin.

Furthermore, when they were in the woods, they said "No golden light had ever been so precious as the gloom of this dark forest" (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 213). This sentence says they are aware that they cannot be together because they have sinned and broken the rules. Of course, love was not the problem,



but the weight of their sin on their daily lives. They, especially Arthur, had not yet admitted to himself that he was truly a sinner.

Finally, the forest is considered a place of darkness for the Puritans. They think all the evil on Earth is placed there, and that is why Hester was cast away to the edge of the town, for being an adulterous person, a sinner. She was, practically speaking, the living evidence of darkness and evil to the colonists.

## 2.2 Natural versus Supernatural

As the story continues, the reader can observe how the author uses some natural and supernatural elements to make the story more interesting and detailed, just as a romance novel should. The book not only offers some examples of natural and supernatural aspects but also gives interpretations of these aspects. When “The Prison Door” chapter is read, the first example of this kind is found, the rosebush. This beautiful and fragrant bush grows outside a place that Hawthorne describes as sad and abandoned. It is the jail of the colony where criminals are shut up while they are waiting to receive punishment for their transgressions against God and the colony.

This is the description the author gives to the rose bush:

“But on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imag-



ined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him". (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 76).

Hawthorne clearly shows both sides that are being discussed. On the one hand, there is the rosebush which is described as beautiful, with a fragrance that is offered to all the people who are condemned to be in that ugly and dark place. This is an element of nature, something that the world possesses and gives to everyone else as a gift of life.

On the other hand, some questions come to mind: is it all about the rosebush? Not at all. Why can a beautiful element of the natural world grow on one side of a prison door? Maybe it is not just something beautiful to look at. If the reader thinks about what nature is, he/she will realize that nature gives something extra to people aside from its beauty.

"Lastly, Hawthorne describes a rose bush seen protruding from the overgrown weeds surrounding the prison. This is a very important symbol throughout the novel, as it shows how beauty can rise from anything." (Elliot "The Use of Symbolism in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter")



The fact that something gorgeous grows in such a terrible place where only sinners and guilty people go, makes the public think it could be a symbol of love and forgiveness. This element of nature provides the guilty with a more beautiful outlook than that in which they are forced to stay. It means a part of nature can grow in any place it wants to, in spite of the unnatural elements present there. In addition, it also offers the prisoners some spiritual promises such as forgiveness, love, hope, and affection that they would need during their stay in the prison.

In the same chapter, another example of natural and supernatural that can be found is in the idea of the “black flower”. Hawthorne says, that “...had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison.” (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 75-76).

This phrase has two sides as well. The prison is a place built by some people, the Puritans, to punish criminals. This building is very natural for Puritan people, and they think every person who does not agree with them must be punished. Thus, it is a big part of their lives, their philosophy, their ways of thinking, and acting, and their being so deeply integrated in their beliefs and thoughts in their search for a perfect life.

“He describes the undergrowth that slowly overwhelms the prison walls symbolizing the corrupt society.” (Elliot “The Use of Symbolism in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*”)



Hawthorne describes the prison as a “black flower” being an unnatural element on Earth. The author says it is a terrible and unattractive force created by humans. Human beings are part of nature, a small part of it; therefore, if people create something aside from it, they are constructing something unnatural. The prison is a human invention to try to stop crime, and sin. Nature did not create it and it is not part of it, so it is something that sprung up from human fears and darkness.

A third example of the same chapter appears, when Hawthorne says:

“...so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally overshadowed it..., (the rose bush) had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson as she entered the prison- door...” (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 76).

First, it is necessary to know who Ann Hutchinson was:

“Anne Hutchinson née Anne Marbury (baptized July 20, 1591, Alford Lincolnshire, England– died August or September 1643 Pelham Bay, New York (U.S).) religious liberal who became one of the founders of Rhode Island after her banishment from Massachusetts Bay Colony.



Anne Marbury was the daughter of a silenced clergyman and grew up in an atmosphere of learning. She married William Hutchinson, a merchant, in 1612m and in 1634 they migrated to Massachusetts Bay Colony. Anne Hutchinson soon organized weekly meetings of Boston women to discuss recent sermons and to give expression to her own theological views.” (“Anne Hutchinson”)

She, just as Hester, was rejected by Puritans. She thought only faith was needed, and not the strict adherence to human law. Again the rosebush means the natural part of the world with all its beauty. The Puritans used to say they acted because they were acting in the name of God. It was supposed that a supernatural force, God, ruled through all the rules they had in their colony. When Hawthorne talks about the gigantic oaks and pines, he talks about the powerful people and institutions that tried to keep Ann Hutchinson quiet. One more time, the natural element of the rose-bush is shown with the supernatural elements of God’s rules.

In Chapter Two, “The Market Place”, while Hester is on the Scaffold, Hawthorne says the scarlet letter took her to some other place, a place where she was alone with herself. He mentions that the letter has the effect of a spell. First, the letter is beautiful, and is perfectly made by Hester showing her skill with the needle. In this case, Hester is shown as good at sewing and she creates amaz-



ing clothes. That is her ultimate skill, ergo her gift from nature. However, this same letter has another effect according to Hawthorne.

“In the eyes of the Puritan church, the supernatural world was seen as evil.” (Renee “The Supernatural Encounters in the Short Fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne”)

When he uses the word spell, he links it with witchcraft. This is a supernatural force which is not part of the good of nature. It is based on evil beliefs connected with Satan. Satan is not a good force; humans understand Satan as an evil force that is at war with creation. References to dancing, flying in the sky, and using some weeds to hurt people are qualities attributed to people such as witches who practice evil according to Satan’s commands. However, most likely witches were killed at that time because they refused to agree with Puritan beliefs and ways of treating people. Most likely people who were accused of being witches were not witches at all.

Maybe the witches who were killed at that time did not agree with Puritan beliefs and ways of treating people.

In Chapter Three, the scarlet letter on Hester’s chest also has a supernatural effect. When Hester is in prison, people say the passageway of the jail was illuminated by the scarlet letter. One more time, the light is linked with evil. They say that this light was the glow of the fire that exists in hell. Witchcraft is again linked with Hester because sinners, and specifically witches, were the ones that



supposedly adored Satan and possibly could see him. The supernatural effect of the letter appeared in the prison corridor according to some people's reports.

Another example of the supernatural versus the natural occurs in "The Minister's Vigil" (Chapter Twelve) when Arthur, Hester, and little Pearl are standing on the scaffold. Suddenly a meteor appears in the sky; Arthur thought it was a sign to show the entire town that he was Pearl's father and a sinner too. It was also a supernatural sign for some people in town. They thought the letter A formed by the meteor meant 'Angel,' after Governor Winthrop's death.

"By a ghastly miracle its semblance is reproduced upon the breast of the minister, where "God's eye beheld it! the angels were forever pointing at it! the devil knew it well, and fretted it continually with the touch of his burning finger!"—and at last, to Dimmesdale's crazed imagination, its spectre appears even in the midnight sky as if heaven itself had caught the contagion of his so zealously hidden sin." (J. Hawthorne "The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne" 1)

Although some meteors can go through the sky at night because of the nature of the universe, at this time in the novel, the meteor is seen as a supernatural sign sent by God. The Puritans thought it occurred because God was watching over them all the time.





### 2.3 Sun versus Moon

Hawthorne describes different behaviors and activities which were common to the Puritans during the twenty-four hours of a day. He explains how some actions and feelings can be seen when the radiance of the sun comes down from the sky; and when the beautiful, opaque, and romantic light of the moon comes down as well. The novel has two main plots, one during daytime, and the other at nighttime. The action revolves around moonlight and sunlight.

The first type of plot is related to all the people's activities that are accepted by the Puritan society without any kind of fear. The second refers to the opposite, all the behavior, actions, and activities which have to remain covered by the darkness of the night, all those that were unacceptable and punished by the community.

The sunlight illuminates all the everyday lives of the people. It shows everything that happens in the town, and reveals any sin, crime, or transgression visible to



the eyes of the Puritans. When any rule is broken during the day, and people see it, they try to make the transgressor pay for his/her mistake. So nothing can be unnoticed in a town where people try to have a perfect life, where they propose to live in peace after all the death, drama, and sin they have experienced in the Old World.

For example, when Hester went out from the prison to be placed on the scaffold, the sun shone so brightly that Hester appeared only like a shadow. This of course tells the reader that the light of the sun exposes all Hester's sin and embarrassment. While she was inside the prison, her shame and sin was kept there with her. However, her terrible behavior was finally exposed in the daylight to all the townspeople who were mad, disappointed, and embarrassed by her attitude. Moreover, the light of the sun exposes not just Hester's sin but her beauty, too. The author says she shines just like the sun, he says she is beautiful and her hair is as radiant as the light of a yellow star.

The daytime also shows the nonconformity of Hester to the Puritan laws. Hester decided to follow her heart instead of the impositions of the town. In short, her thoughts and own beliefs concerning life and love were uncovered to a crowd that only wanted to penalize her.

However, there is something that sunlight could not show to Hester's judges, her daughter's father's name. Although sun uncovered almost everything during the day, it was ineffective in revealing who Pearl's father was. In this way, it was also unsuccessful in revealing the guilty person who was the lover of Hester.



The sun could not show the person who broke the laws along with Hester. So it can be said that the inner feelings and secrets only remained in the mind and heart of the sinner who had committed that abuse in the town.

In addition the sun cannot explain the sudden sickness and weakness of Arthur Dimmesdale. He looks so fragile, and constantly puts his hand over his chest because of his sin. When people notice Dimmesdale's health problem, they still look at him as a pure person, and they even think he is an angel. Once again, the sun cannot show why Arthur is sick and why he is placing his hand on his chest. The sun cannot reveal the depths of his heart and thoughts.

In Chapter Three, despite the efforts of Roger Chillingworth to hide in the crowd from Hester, the revealing light of the sun uncovered and even accentuated his deformity for Hester to acknowledge and fear. It was her husband, the man who had abandoned her for so long. No one could hide from the light, because every object, every person, every sin, and every detail was noticed during the day-time.

The day Hester went out from prison, the sun was shining. The sun showed the world that Hester was a sinner in a town where sin and crime were hated. Even Hester felt uncomfortable; she thought the sun enabled the scarlet letter to be seen by everyone else. After that, during the day, Hester was humiliated and insulted by children; she was the center of church sermons. In this case, the day made visible the cruelty of the people who lived in that town, and showed how they were unable and unwilling to forgive and forget mistakes.



At the same time, the daylight pointed out Hester's ability with the needle. Although the scarlet letter stood for adultery, it also revealed how beautiful the letter had been sewn, perfectly embroidered, a masterpiece. Hester was shown as a sinner, but one who was quite talented.

In addition, the sunlight illuminated Pearl's and Hester's beauty. When Hester was in the forest with Arthur and Pearl, she decided to leave that place along with Arthur. She felt so strong when she talked about having a new opportunity in the world that she untied her hair and took off the scarlet letter from her chest. After this, the sunlight shone over her. It was as if nature was in love with Hester's beauty, and nature was so happy about it that it wanted to show everything in that place how gorgeous Hester was. So, perhaps it could be said that the sunlight showed up Hester's wondrous beauty.

Moving ahead into what night symbolizes, in Chapter Four, when Hester got back to the prison, she was nervous and angry. That is why Chillingworth was asked to attend to her because he was a physician. When they were face to face, Roger persuaded Hester to tell him her child's name. Of course, she did not want to. After that, he said he was going to find out who the person was that had sinned along with her. He also wanted to get revenge and punish this man for what he did to Hester.

As was said before, the prison was a dark place, obscure and cold just as the night. In that place, Chillingworth's intentions were revealed to Hester. In the



jail, Chillingworth was not pretending to Hester that he did not know her anymore. He demonstrated to her how revengeful he could be.

Aside from this episode, people started to talk about the light of the scarlet letter in prison. They said the letter had a special light inside the confines of the jail. For them, it was like the flames of hell illuminating the halls of the dark jail. They linked the sinfulness of the scarlet letter with the evil and darkness of the prison atmosphere. Puritans also used to think witches made their spells and adored Satan in the darkness of the night, and they considered Hester as a part of sin and hell. Maybe that is why they thought the scarlet letter shone in the corridors like the light of hell.

Moreover, in Chapter Eight when Hester is walking back home, Mistress Hibbins talks to her. She asks Hester to join her and the rest of the witches in the forest at night. This means witchcraft was performed when the Puritans were sleeping and could not see the terrible and forbidden acts. The night was the only witness of witches' dancing and meetings, and darkness covered all their evil rituals so that no one saw them. The forest was a refuge for witches. It offered them a safe place to be comfortable to do what they wanted to do. That is why people from the town used to hear the witches only at night.

In Chapter Twelve, Dimmesdale is able to stand on the scaffold alone. This scene happens when nobody else can see him, at night. Although he thinks the entire universe can see his sin and his own scarlet letter on his chest, no one is actually able to see him. In short, inner secrets, feelings, and thoughts emerge



during the light of the moon when people are not there to criticize and judge them. It is the box of secrets that are deep inside the heart and mind of a man, in this case Dimmesdale's. Besides Dimmesdale can cry out his anguish without any kind of shame or fear; he can do it because there is no one around to see him in the darkness of the night.

## 2.4 Other Contrasts

### 2.4.1 Civilization versus Wilderness

The author conceives of some ideas and actions in two places just as he conceived of the light of the sun and the light of the moon. Both places were important for the Puritans because they meant a great deal to them. The citizens had different feelings about the town where they lived and spent their lives; and they also had the opposite feelings towards the place where civilization did not exist and where their rules were not accepted and practiced.

Puritans believed that the town was the only place where they could be safe. They imagined that within the confines of the town was the only place where they could not be harmed by outside forces. It is necessary to keep in mind that the colony of the Puritans came from England to escape a world of sin and death. They felt that it was wrong to kill; however, killing humans was something that happened constantly in the Old World with no apparent solution. The same situation happened regarding crime and sin. Puritans felt their colony offered them a space where they could be safe from death and crime.



Moreover, they wanted a place where their rules would be respected and followed by the people who lived there. They created many rules to have a better life than the one they had had in England. They thought rigid rules would solve the problems of humanity. They also wanted to avoid suffering from the same situations they had to endure in the Old World. Punishment of every offense against their religion, law, and town was the solution, according to them, for the 'old problems'. The colony is mentioned in the novel as a hard, grim, and cruel place; perhaps, Puritans were tired of the life in England, of a society where what they wanted was not offered to them.

According to the novel Hester was punished because she broke the town's rules. She ended up pregnant with the baby of a man who was not her husband.



Adultery in Puritan times was detested, and it was harshly penalized. Puritans used to execute the person who committed adultery in the community; so Hester supposedly had to be killed by the community in order to erase her sin and



make everybody else realize that that particular kind of transgression would not happen again. Nevertheless, she was not executed because of her child and because the magistrates were not sure whether her husband was alive or dead. Despite this decision, the colony wanted her to pay for what she had done in some way. Breaking rules was a great offense in those times; and that is why Hester had to stand on the scaffold with her child while having all the community staring at her, her baby, and her scarlet letter. Her sin was so serious that women criticized her with much severity; they wanted her to have the letter branded on her forehead instead of only sewn on her chest.

Public embarrassment was the strategy used by the people to humiliate a sinner. As the story unfolds, the reader can imagine how Hester felt in the moment that she was exposed to the crowd for having loved someone. She was experiencing society's disapproval of adultery. This is why she started remembering all her past life from the time that she lived with her family in England; her mind wanted to escape from the suffering and humiliation she was experiencing.







The supposed perfect civilization created by Puritans made Hester into an out-cast, pointed at by everyone in the village. Hester had to accept the way people looked at her and talked about her. Even children were very cruel to her and to little Pearl:

“Throughout her daily struggles, Pearl is shaped from the negative words and actions directed towards her; however, she maintains the innocence of a child.” (Elliot “The Use of Symbolism in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter.”

Puritan children were not allowed to play with Pearl. This was a society and a civilization that supposedly followed the rules of God and was a safe place to live in and be respected as a human being.

Puritans also thought the colony was a blessed place where all the light of God was present. For them the city was the place where God lived and protected them from the ‘Black Man’.

“They were fully convinced that they had a mandate from God to change the system.” (Finley “Puritan History, Past, Present, And Future”)

They felt they were the kind of people who deserved to live there because they were not sinners; they followed the written words of God, the Holy Book. In



those times the forest had not been explored and that was the reason people feared it and saw it as the place where sinners and witches were located, and where prohibited actions took place.



Moreover, celebrations and parades lacked typical noise and festivity. Puritans disliked noise. First, people wore gray or black clothes to avoid drawing the attention of others.

“Puritans were not against all forms of dancing but were opposed to men and women dancing together as partners, “gynecandrical dancing” as Increase Matter termed it, because this might easily arouse inappropriate sexual passions” (“Recreation”)

Celebrations took place in the streets of the town with no music, no dancing, no theatre, and no magicians. According to Hawthorne, Puritans wanted to avoid such fanfare in order to live in peace. In England celebrations were noisy af-



fairs, and Puritans wanted to erase those customs from their lives. They had created a life of discipline and calm during any kind of holiday or celebration. They supposedly felt happy with their style of living. Of course it is unknown whether everyone in town agreed with it; however, all Puritans had to follow the rules of the colony.

In short, Puritans created a life without excess, noise, sin, crime, or death. They tried to eliminate from their lives and colony the activities that had hurt them in the past when they lived in England. They tried to be surrounded by people who respected the rules and the commandments of God to try to make their dreams come true. That is why they imagined the colony to be the safest place on earth; they saw it as the place where transgressions were not allowed and where only the sons and daughters of God were admitted. Of course, they thought they were the only people who obeyed God's words, and who lived in a place where only the chosen ones deserved to be.

The forest was the second place where different actions took place during the development of the novel. In the forest, Puritan rules did not exist. The forest did not have any effect on people or circumstances because there was no human presence there. Nature itself did not have the kinds of rules that affect something or someone. The forest was a place where all the punishment, severity, and cruelty of people disappeared; it offered peace, freedom, and calm to everyone. Nature was so beautiful and good that transgression against people, feelings, or thoughts was nonexistent. However, Puritans did not think it was a



quiet place; for them it was Satan's place. The environment of the forest was completely different from that of the colony with all the Puritan authority.

However, some people felt they could relax in the forest. They did not have to act as if they were someone they were not. They could express themselves and show their real essence without any remorse. They could take off their fake personality and show their inner self. The ones who liked to be in the forest felt it was a setting where different activities could take place with no fear of others. They also liked it because, there, no one could judge them or see them as sinners, witches or the plague of civilization. They felt the forest provided them with the security and freedom they needed because they did not have to hide their inner secrets, feelings, or thoughts in that place. In the forest, people could leave behind the binding rules of a severe society. Pearl, for example, feels good in the forest because "Pearl instinctively comprehends her position as a born outcast from the world of christened infants, and requites their scorn and contumely with the bitterest hatred,—a passion of enmity which she had "inherited by inalienable right, out of Hester's heart" (J. Hawthorne " The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne 1)

Hester's punishment was to live on the edge of the town and to wear the scarlet letter. She had to live in a cottage with her little child next to a place which was considered by most people to be as evil as her. They linked her with the edge of the forest because, as was said, most of the settlers thought the forest was Satan's place, and to them Hester was just as evil as Satan. Her little child de-



served to live there because she was the result of a transgression against their rules, and therefore against God.

“Pearl, as we are frequently reminded, is the scarlet letter made alive, capable of being loved and so endowed with a manifold power of retribution for sin” (J. Hawthorne “ The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne 3)

Pearl was born from sin and was the living proof of the adultery of her mother; Pearl was not really blessed by God because she was conceived out of marriage, and that was a kind of capital sin against the whole community and beliefs. Actually, Hester was cast away; she finally could live in peace with Pearl in her lonely house between the forest and the colony. She could find relief there from all the humiliation she had to go through when she went to town.

“The witchcraft episodes of the seventeenth century, when women were accused and convicted far more than men and when women actually confessed to be in the devil’s snare, display the sense of women’s inherent wickedness which the community—women and men—endorsed.” (Reis 2)

Witchcraft was punished by Puritans. They thought witches were evil people who adored Satan or the ‘Black Man’ as they called him. They believed all this was part of the dark forest where evil forces dominated. In this way, in Chapter



Eight when Hester was getting back to her cottage from the Governor's home, she met Mistress Hibbins. Mistress Hibbins was known as a witch by the townspeople. This woman asked of Hester an unusual thing; she asked Hester to meet her in the forest to dance, see the Black Man and make some spells during the night. The conversation between the witch and Hester showed that witches felt free in the forest and liked to spend time doing their activities outside the confines of the colony with its severe rules. The forest offered witchcraft a setting where it could be practiced without the judgment and punishment of the Puritan society. Witches also thought the forest was a place where evil forces lived.

In Chapter Sixteen a meeting between Arthur and Hester took place. It could only have happened in that one place where both of them could talk with no danger. The forest was the only setting that provided them with a secure place where they could be free from their secret with nature as the only witness. Hester felt she and Arthur could be at peace and could breathe freely without any pressure or fear there. When Hester and Pearl arrived in the woods, they sat near a brook; however, they were among big trees and the noise of water kept their secrets from being revealed to others.



In the forest, Hester told Arthur the real identity of the one who was supposed to be curing him. She said Chillingworth was her husband and he wanted to get revenge against Arthur. Once again a secret was revealed in the forest. In Chapter Four, Roger asked Hester not to tell anyone he was her husband. After seven years, she finally uncovered her husband's real motive for being near Arthur. She could speak there with no one from the town around them to find out that Roger was her husband. She wanted to avoid more problems with the Puritans and she intended to save Dimmesdale's life.

In the forest, both Hester and Arthur could be themselves without pretending to be what they were not. Hester showed that she was stronger than in the past, but Arthur was weaker. She told Arthur they could run away from the Puritans and finally be a family without the oppression she had experienced during all those years of punishment.



She showed her inner feelings and could talk to him easily; possibly she was still in love with him. Arthur, however, said he was afraid of facing the world alone. Here he showed how weak and how much of a coward he was, portraying and accentuating the differences between the people's opinion of him and reality. He also showed his lack of power and determination for fighting for what he supposedly loved.

In Chapter Twelve, the reader can realize that the real Dimmesdale is weak, cowardly, and unable to act. He opened his heart and mind in the forest because the forest would keep his secret and no one could point at or embarrass him for his actions and attitude. Notwithstanding, Hester's predisposition to help her daughter's father and to be able to go somewhere else in the world to fight for their love has to be emphasized.

In the next chapter, Hester felt so well that she took away the embroidered scarlet letter from her chest. Hester's attitude concerning her punishment is shown in the wilderness. Even nature seemed to agree that she had paid for the sin. When she untied her hair the sun shone over her at last. While the Puritans dis-





agreed with her way of loving, it seemed that the forest, and nature itself, were able to forgive her and give her a new opportunity to be the woman she was with all the power and force she had inside of her. During her meeting with Arthur she felt she was breaking free, that she would finally be happy, and leave behind all the terrible moments of her life. One more time, the forest provided peace, comfort, and freedom to its visitors.

“She exhibits an unflinching vigor and vivacity of spirits joined to a precocious and almost preternatural intelligence, especially with reference to her mother's shameful badge.” (J. Hawthorne “The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne 3)

Even Pearl could feel free in the woods. She could dance and sing, and her beauty, energy, and clothes were not questioned by anyone. The forest was a safe place for her and her parents. However, Pearl reminded her mother of her situation in the new world. The little child was able to explain what she thought when Hester took off the scarlet letter.

In Chapter Twenty, Arthur returned to the town with new energy he had not had before. Even Mistress Hibbins perceived the minister's change and she implied that it was because he was with the black man. However, Arthur changed because Hester cheered him up, and, for a short period of time, he felt himself in a sphere where evil, severe rules, judgment, cruelty, pressure, and closed minds were not allowed. He could also express to himself his inner secrets, feelings,



and thoughts about his sin. He could realize how cowardly and weak he was for not having the power to face the whole world for Hester, his daughter and himself. In the forest, Arthur and Hester could act like the people they were without the masks that covered their passion, beauty, fear, and weakness.

#### 2.4.2 Public guilt versus Private guilt

Puritans were very strict people and had harsh rules to counteract any kind of transgression against God. It is known that a person who committed adultery had to be punished with death in those times; so every individual needed to try to be a model example in society to avoid being executed.

However, the novel is not based on that kind of penalty. Hester, who was a married woman, had a child with another man who was not her husband. The entire town was upset because of it; they felt she was an evil person, along with her child. Nevertheless, Hester was not condemned to death but to public humiliation. After being in a dark jail with her little baby, Pearl, she had to go out and stand on the scaffold in front of all the Puritans as her judges.

When Hester was standing on the scaffold, each person in the crowd felt morally superior to her. She felt so embarrassed and bad that she tried to hide the scarlet letter on her chest with her own baby; as the narrator says it was impossible because the little child was Hester's letter in the flesh. So hard was it for her to be the center of attention of the entire town and to be judged by everyone



that she started to call up memories from her past thus enclosing herself in a kind of sphere.



“At the start of the novel, it (the letter A) is used to symbolize adultery and shame, as with Hester's scarlet letter, but throughout the novel it begins to take a power of its own, at one point even standing for able.” (Elliot “The Use of Symbolism in The Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter”)

During the following years, Hester had to wear the scarlet letter as a punishment for her behavior. She also was cast out of the community. She moved to the border of the colony at the edge of the forest, so she would be far from the place where she had sinned and near the setting where Puritans believed that evil actions such as hers happened.



Aside from living apart from other townspeople, Hester continued being punished in other ways by the people of the colony. Even children were cruel to her and to Pearl. Children used some inappropriate words when they yelled at Hester and her daughter.

“Pearl, Hester's daughter, is the product of a "sin", and because of this she has been treated as an outcast her whole life. “ (Elliot “The Use of Symbolism in The Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter”)

Pearl was not allowed to play with other children because she could be a bad example for them since she was the product of evil. As the reader notices, Hester and Pearl were pointed at by everyone and were humiliated by the members of such a supposedly perfect colony. They were the only ones who were punished for several years in public; they had to go through all their suffering alone. When talking about private guilt, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale comes to mind. He was Hester's lover and Pearl's father, so he was as guilty as she. Nevertheless, he was not strong enough to accept his sin in front of the community. He was such a coward that he even asked Hester to say the name of the father of her baby. He could not show the people his inner secret and he was not punished in public.

Although Arthur was unable to confess himself as the person who loved Hester, and was not penalized for his sin by the colony, he was castigated by his own thoughts and the remorse in his own heart and mind. He was attacked by his



own sense of guilt which did not forgive him. He felt so bad that he started hurting himself in an act of punishment for his sin. However, he could not obtain forgiveness or feel good in spite of his self torture.

“As Hester suffers public exposure and frank ignominy, so he is wrapped in secret torments; and either mode of punishment is shown to be powerless for good.” (J. Hawthorne “The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne 2)

He felt worse every time he saw Hester and his child being humiliated and cast away from the community. Notwithstanding, he could not do anything to protect them or to prevent the terrible suffering they had to go through alone every single day.

Moreover, his deep remorse did not allow him to stay calm. That is why he started to feel and show weakness. Of course Hester’s husband’s desire for revenge worsened the situation when Roger began attacking Arthur’s heart and mind. Roger made Arthur feel so guilty and such a traitor before God and the Puritans that the reverend’s health was deteriorating more and more each day.

Thus, it can be said that Roger’s inner deep secrets and faults were worse than the ones shown to the world. Hester’s public guilt was very hard on her and her baby, but it made her stronger, not weaker. The opposite happened to Dimmesdale. He had to fight with himself against his deep remorse and it made him



weaker, thinner, older, and sicker. He could not stand up under the pressure of the thoughts and feelings inside his heart and mind. At the end of the novel, Hester and Pearl went to England after being forgiven by the townspeople and after being considered angels and good persons; however, Dimmesdale died because of his private guilt and was asking for forgiveness during the last moments of his life.

### 2.5 Identity and Society

As the reader continues reading the novel he/she realizes how things were twisted in this society which looked for the perfect place to live. In spite of their belief in their perfection, Puritans were blind with respect to everything concerning God.

Hester was the only one in the colony who was punished, cast away, humiliated, and judged. She was forced to wear the scarlet letter made by herself, sewn on her bosom as a penalty for what she did and as the proof of her sin; therefore, everyone in the community would know about it. However, all the adverse circumstances made her stronger and more able to repent for her transgression against the colony and God. She was willing to change and show every one she was not the evil person everybody thought she was. For seven years, although she was insulted and penalized, she did not do any evil to anybody. She only focused on being forgiven and showing her inner perfect essence.



She worked very hard to make the scarlet letter have a different meaning from the one people knew. She tried to change the meaning of the symbol on her chest through her good deeds, through her repentance, and through her attitude during all the years of her punishment. She was so good to everyone that she began to be seen from a different view point by the Puritans. They began thinking the letter A did not mean “adulterous”, but rather, “angel” or “able.” They thought her sin and her daughter had made her change to be a better woman for society, a better mother for her daughter, and a better servant of God. She finally found and showed her real identity.

In contrast, Reverend Dimmesdale could not find his identity. He struggled with all his inner secrets and guilt, and he was unable to decide whether he was a good minister or an evil person and a sinner. He thought he could do many things in the name of God and humanity in the colony. However, he felt devastated inside because of the hypocrisy of his personality in front of the Puritan society. In short, he did not know who he was and what to do to be forgiven by God and the people who trusted him.

Hester was involved in a society where people were obsessed with religion; as they were obsessed with it, they thought everyone who had a connection with the church was pure. That was how Arthur was seen by the community; every time he gave his speeches people thought he was an angel.

““The community in which he abides certainly shows a commendable lack of suspicion towards him: even old



Mistress Hibbins whose scent for moral carrion was as keen as that of a modern society journal, can scarcely credit her own conviction.” (J. Hawthorne “The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne 2)

They were unable to see Dimmesdale as a person who made mistakes, as a sinner, and as Hester’s lover. People had a conception of sanctity concerning the members of the church. They thought those people were actually sent from heaven and were pure in their hearts, minds, and souls, unable to break rules. Even when the minister died confessing his sin, they thought he had gone mad, and he did not know what he was saying. They made fools of themselves because they did not want to accept the fact that he was a transgressor of God’s laws on Earth; they rejected the obvious truth. For them, all members of the church were pure and good and these holy men would enter directly into heaven. For that reason, they could not perceive his hypocritical actions, his sin, and his guilt.

## 2.6 Recognized Sin versus Unrecognized Sin

The Puritan colony had very strict rules with respect to God and the members. They wanted to make their town a better place to live in, to raise their children away from all the actions and activities which had taken place in the Old World from which they had escaped. They believed that any sin or broken rule was a crime against God and needed to be punished.





However, the reader needs to know what the real sins were. First, Hester was accused of loving someone who was not her husband and of having a child with him. Hester was married to a man who was older than she, he was not as attractive as Hester was; and she was not in love with him.

In those times, marriages often happened because the bride's and groom's families arranged them. Most marriages brought about an economic benefit for the families.

Be that as it may, this man left her alone for too long a time without sending any letter to let her know he was alive. It seemed he had abandoned her in the New World. This makes the reader wonder, did he and she really understand what kind of commitment they had made to each other? Maybe neither of them knew what they were doing.

After being alone and abandoned by her husband, Hester found a man who made her feel something she probably had never felt, love. She fell in love with Arthur Dimmesdale whose love was forbidden to her because she was married to another man. Also, Dimmesdale was a reverend of the church. After having sex with him, she got pregnant and the entire colony was furious since they considered her a sinner and an adulteress. Again some questions come to mind. What was her sin? Was her sin that of marrying a man, Roger Chillingworth, whom she did not know and did not love, not having any idea of what the commitment of marriage was? Or was her sin to fall in love for the first time with a man who really had something exceptional for her?



Because she fell in love she was punished by being humiliated and being an outcast from town. Did she really deserve it? Maybe she did not. She did not deserve to go through all the humiliation and cruelty the Puritans inflicted on her; and she proved she was not a bad person after setting a good example for many years.

One more time, the author gives the reader the opportunity to have different answers and points of view. In this case, Hester's real sin was to marry a man who was a stranger to her and for whom she did not have any feeling. That was her biggest mistake and it was a crime against herself and her heart.

Now it is time to analyze Arthur Dimmesdale's sin and crime. He was a member of the church and considered pure by the people; he also knew Hester was married to a man who had not shown up in the town.

“Dimmesdale cares more for his social reputation than for anything else. His self-respect, his peace, his love, his soul,—all may go: only let his reputation remain! And yet it is that selfsame false reputation that daily causes him the keenest anguish of all.” (J. Hawthorne “The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne 2)

Again some questions come to mind; was his sin that he was a part of the adultery along with Hester because of Hester's commitment? Or was his sin that he



was a hypocrite because he continued acting like a member of the church who had not made any mistakes in life, even to the point of changing his speeches to please the congregation of the church?

Perhaps his biggest sin and crime was to be a hypocrite. He was acting as a son of God, but hid all his feelings and guilt. He left Hester and her daughter alone to face the town, and he even asked Hester to tell the name of the man who had sinned with her, who, of course, was himself.

However, he was not punished by the rules Puritans had, but by his own remorse which penalized him, making him weaker and more of a coward each day. The reader might think he was the one who should have been punished instead of Hester and her little baby. He deserved to be publicly humiliated and outcast, not just for being an adulterer, but for being a hypocrite with everyone, even with God.

Now moving on to Roger Chillingworth, who was Hester's husband and who wanted to get revenge against Arthur, it is necessary to say that he made friends with and became the doctor of Dimmesdale, and that is how he started to attack the Reverend from within. Chillingworth was also guilty of causing Hester's adultery. As was said before, he left her alone in a new place with no news from him for two years. At this point other questions arise, was Chillingworth's sin the abandonment of his wife in the new world for such a long time? Or was his sin that of not forgiving Hester and Arthur for their affair after he abandoned her?



The answer of course is the second one. However, why didn't he forgive them? He was furious with the reverend because he was attractive, and young. Chillingworth obviously envied Arthur for what he offered Hester that made her fall in love with him. That is why he wanted to make Arthur pay for his adultery with Hester.

“The real agony of sin, as Chillingworth clearly perceived, lies not in its commission, which is always delightful, nor in its open punishment, which is a kind of relief, but in the dread of its discovery. The revenge which he plans, therefore, depends above all things upon keeping his victim's secret.” (J. Hawthorne “The Scarlet Letter” by Nathaniel Hawthorne 4)

He also started a secret and effective counterattack against the Reverend causing his health to worsen day by day. Roger was not punished for helping Arthur die, but he deserved to be punished just as Hester was. It was necessary to make him know that it was not fair to stab people in the back or play with people's minds.

Thus, all three sinners had at least two sins to be judged and punished. Nevertheless, it depends on the reader's thoughts and opinions as to which sins are the most important and which are the worst.



### CHAPTER 3: CONTRAST IN RELIGIOUS AND MORAL THEMES

The Scarlet Letter is a romantic historical novel, and this is something that was mentioned before. It tells the story of an event which happened during Puritan times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries specifically. The colonists were a group of Puritan protestant people who wanted to escape from all the established rules in England.

“They could start out afresh and lay a new foundation in a new land. Over in the English colonies they could then proceed to build an entirely new society from the ground up” (Finley “Puritan History, Past, Present, And Future”).

They ran away from their own country and found a new land which served them as a place to build a new colony with their own rules and prescribed behavior where they could be free and happy. This new place would provide them with some security for their families and give them an opportunity to start a new life; they felt the new colony would provide them with freedom and hope.

As was already said, Puritans had some attitudes and rules which revolved around their religion, and any transgression against them was brutally punished by the town in the name of God.



“The Puritans considered the Bible as the true law of God that provided guidelines for church government.”  
(Wilson “Puritan, Religious and Social Movement”)

The Bible was the main tool for Puritans because it had what God supposedly wanted from all human beings. It was a book with all the guidelines necessary to please God and be happy during a lifetime.

One important point about the Puritan religion is that Puritans did not separate Politics from Religious life. They considered them as one, and they made their religion influence the entire area of law and the way the town was managed.

“Their religious life and their social and political life were in a collective and co-operative unity. It was all part of their communal life out there in the colonies.” (Finley “Puritan History, Past, Present, And Future”)

They set rules and laws based on their religious beliefs, and linked them to achieve a better place and community to live in. Obviously, they thought their way was the best manner to change the old form of life that England had offered its citizens. The Old World had had terrible ways which the Puritans wanted to escape from.



### 3.1 The Puritan religion and morals.

The Scarlet Letter contains many details which show how Puritan times were.

First of all it is necessary to know who the Puritans were.

“Puritans were members of a religious and social movement of the 1500's and 1600's. The movement began in England and spread to America where it greatly influenced social, political, and religious institutions. Such religious denominations as Congregationalism and Unitarianism developed from Puritan beliefs.” (Wilson “Puritan, Religious and Social Movement”)

It is clear who they were and what their influences were. Puritans looked for a new life and new opportunity in the New World. They wanted to have a setting which was the opposite of England; they wanted to escape from their land of birth and arrive at a place where they could practice their beliefs.

Moreover, Puritans wanted to manage all the power in the new land and they tried to avoid any circumstance that was against their thoughts and biblical beliefs. That is why they set rules to establish specific behavior and in that way to control the citizens. Puritans wanted to have under their control the entire town in order to obtain peace, happiness, and a life according to God's commands.



Religion was very important to the Puritans in their everyday lives. They were very faithful to their religion; but what was it?

“Puritanism, a religious reform movement in the late 16th and 17th centuries that sought to “purify” the Church of England of remnants of the Roman Catholic “popery” that the Puritans claimed had been retained after the religious settlement reached early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Puritans became noted in the 17th century for a spirit of moral and religious earnestness that informed their whole way of life, and they sought through church reform to make their lifestyle the pattern for the whole nation. Their efforts to transform the nation contributed both to civil war in England and to the...” (“Puritanism”)

It is clear that Puritans tried to base everything in their lives on religion. They created a world where all the doctrines suggested by the Bible could be respected along with their own thoughts. Those thoughts were born when the Puritans lived in England. After experiencing different circumstances, they decided to build a new town based on their own ideology and religion.

When they settled down in the New World, they started to practice their own rules. They thought the Bible was a book containing all the commands of God





and the guidelines to be followed on Earth. Having the holy book and their own experience from England they created new rules and laws for the town.

They were fanatics in their religion. They emphasized the reading of the Bible and faith in each Bible verse. They considered each member of their society to be linked to God and to his holy word written in the Bible. Perhaps the reason for their obsession with religion was that they believed they were the ones chosen by God to live on Earth and obtain eternal life after death. Maybe they thought Christ died on the cross only for them and not for all humanity. They felt they were special people placed on Earth for a reason: to follow God's commands.

That is why it was a duty for each citizen to go to church and read the Holy Book. It was necessary in a Puritan community where religion was the foundation; but how was the Puritan religion born?

Puritanism was born in England because of people who did not agree with Queen Elizabeth I and her Parliament. She, along with her court, continued the religion of the Church of England set up by Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII. Many people in the country expected Queen Elizabeth to give the citizens a new era different from the era of Queen Mary I that was known for persecution of Protestant people.

However, some events happened during the time from Henry VIII's reign up to Queen Elizabeth's period. "Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509, and Eliza-



both a few days before the beginning of 1559. During the half century between these two dates England was governed by three sovereigns of the House of Tudor and passed through three revolutions in her national Church life.” (Brown 5)

These three big changes in the religious paradigm were crucial for England’s history and people. The first change happened when Henry VIII started his period as king of England and the Pope was the head of the church and the center of it was placed in Rome. Some years later, everything changed in the country. The parliament decided to pass all the power of the Pope to the King with the Act of Supremacy. In this way, all the power in the country was controlled by Henry. This happened in England, but in other parts of the World, such as Germany, the people also tried to change the church.

The second change occurred during Edward VI’s reign. New relations among the leaders of the church in England took place with other ministers of other churches. That is when the English Book of Common Prayer came out for everyone to read. After a while another revolution was to take place in England. This occurred when Queen Mary started her reign in the country. When she gave her speech, she proclaimed that the Catholic Church had to be reestablished according to its old manners and services. She, along with her court, established the Act of Repeal which had different strategies to get the church back to what Mary had practiced when she was a child.



“...Act of Repeal which abolished nine Acts passed in the reign of Edward VI, and restored the Church to the condition in which it was at the death of Henry VIII. Her second Act of Repeal, of 1554, abolished eighteen Acts of Henry relating to the Church, and one of Edward, thus restoring the Church to the condition in which it was in 1529 before the breach with Rome. England was again reconciled to the Papal See, and received absolution for her supposed sin of departure from the true faith” (Brown 7- 8)

As is seen, Queen Mary tried to change what her forefathers had done to the country and religion. Her desire of returning to the old church made her create some laws to counteract the measures taken by former Kings of England. She believed deeply in what she had learned when she was a girl and she wanted her people to continue the practice of that religion. The Pope was again to be the head of the church and the center of it was to be placed in Rome one more time.

However, the country of England was not willing to obey Queen Mary. Queen Mary turned her reign into a nightmare when she started to send people to the stake to be burned. This measure, along with other terrible situations during her reign, caused the Reformation.



“Many of the leading men who had Embraced protes-  
tantism in the reigns of Henry and Edward found, as  
soon as the new Queen came to the throne, that Eng-  
land was no longer a place of safety for them” (Brown  
9).

Many people did not consider their birthplace a good one to live in to be free with respect to their thoughts and perspectives concerning life and religion. Queen Mary’s catholic beliefs made some people realize that they needed to find a place where they could live in peace with their protestant ideas and beliefs. People wanted to find a setting where they could feel safe, so they looked for refuge in reformed churches in other parts of the world. Many Puritans, for example, went to Holland to investigate the situation there.

While those English people were investigating other churches, they strengthened their faith by the reading of the Holy Book. They believed that the new traditions united with the old ones would make their religion closer in spirit to the teachings of Christ.

After the death of Queen Mary, Protestants were optimistic about returning to England. They thought a new era was coming with Elizabeth’s reign; however, they made a terrible mistake in thinking that everything would change.

Elizabeth did encourage the Protestant religion in England again. She, along with her Parliament, established some laws known as Acts to counteract the or-



ders of the former Queen, Mary I. The church Queen Elizabeth established in England was known as the Anglican Church. However, many Protestant people disliked that church. They argued that it was too similar to the Roman Catholic Church. Those protestant people were known as Puritans. They did not agree with the use of ornaments and paintings in churches. They did not like ministers to be wearing white robes; they were against the tradition of playing the organ during the days on which saint's birthdays were celebrated. They also thought people should elect the ministers for the church, not the bishops. These were just a few of the complaints concerning the church and the form of religion supported by Queen Elizabeth.

However, Queen Elizabeth refused to change the religious system based on the Book of Prayer which had been modified by Parliament and herself. She thought the Puritans were a kind of menace to her government because they complained about her reign. She sent her followers to transmit the articles based on the Book of Prayer in order that her subjects understand the new law. Those articles were known as The Injunctions of Elizabeth. Two articles explained the way she wanted things in the church to be managed, article II and XVIII:

“Besides this, to the intent that all superstition and hypocrisy crept into divers men's hearts may vanish away, they shall not set forth or extol the dignity of any images, relics, or miracles; but, declaring the abuse of the same, they shall teach that all goodness, health, and



grace ought to be both asked and looked for only of God, as of the very Author and Giver of the same, and of none other.”

“ Also, to avoid all contention and strife, which heretofore hath risen among the queen’s majesty’s subjects in sundry places of her realms and dominions, by reason of fond courtesy, and challenging of places in procession; and also that they may the more quietly hear that which is said or sung to their edifying, they shall not from henceforth in any parish church at any time use any procession about the church or churchyard, or other place; but immediately before the time of communion of the Sacrament, the priests with other of the quire shall kneel in the midst of the church, and sing or say plainly and distinctly the Litany, which is set forth in English, with all the suffrages following, to the intent the people may hear and answer; and none other procession or litany to be had or used, but the said Litany in English, adding nothing thereto, but as it is now appointed. And in cathedral or collegiate churches the same shall be done in such places...and all ringing and knolling of bells shall be utterly forborne at that time, except one bell at convenient time to be rung or knolled before the sermon. But yet for retaining of the perambu-



lation of the circuits of parishes, they shall once in the year at the time accustomed, with the curate and substantial men of the parish, walk about their parishes, as they were accustomed, and at their return to the church, make their common prayers.” (Queen Elizabeth's Proclamation to Forbid Preaching (1558))

Elizabeth re-established the church that had been established by her father, King Henry VIII. She prohibited excessive processions. The Queen had the supreme power after God. People did not agree with all the rules imposed on them by the Queen, but they had to obey them. Some groups prayed in their own homes while trying to follow their religious beliefs to be nearer to God.

Later Puritans thought their problems would end when James I, former King of Scotland, started reigning in England because he had adapted some rules of the Puritans and had established them in Scotland. However, when he became king of England he followed Elizabeth's pattern of worship.

To top it off for Puritans, when King James passed away and his son was proclaimed as king of England, he, Charles the new king, married a Catholic princess. In this way, religion in England was influenced by Catholicism once more. This situation caused Puritans to leave their country of birth to look for a new place where they could practice their own religion. Puritans travelled to America and arrived at Massachusetts in 1630.



As was already said, Puritans built a cemetery and a prison; and they set down rules and laws for their town. They had finally arrived at a place where they could practice their religion as they wanted.

Puritans believed they had the main implement to survive in the new land, The Bible. They thought it was the perfect manual to guide them on the right path on Earth, to live according to God's wishes. However, they sought to avoid the methods and traditions that Catholics practiced. In the Puritan community religion was their life, and the people of the town were very fanatical about it.

The Puritan Community believed in the equality of the members of the church. They wanted their religion to be free from such authorities as the Pope or the bishops of the Catholic Church. They thought God should be the only head of the church and nobody else should have power over them. They wanted to prohibit people from wearing special clothing as did the bishops or the Pope himself. They believed each member of the church was the same; there could be no hierarchies or differences among them. They also refused to celebrate certain holidays which were celebrated by the Catholic Church, such as Christmas or Easter, because they thought those holidays were pagan oriented and encouraged the adoration of images. However, their religion allowed them to celebrate Thanksgiving and the day of Humiliation and Fasting. Puritans firmly believed Puritanism was the only religion that followed the correct path to God. Puritans believed that they were the Chosen Ones.





Moreover, they thought religious and political laws should be one. Anyone who disobeyed the commandments of the Bible or God's laws would be punished. They wanted the government to enforce moral standards. Puritans were not to drink alcohol; they could not dress in colorful clothes. They could not dance or partake of loud festivities. They thought their authorities should take control of morality and punish all offenders of moral standards. That is why Puritans created new laws and policies to live in the new world based on their concepts of God as set down in the Holy Scriptures; they mixed political issues with religious issues. In their opinion government and church should be one.

They had strong spiritual inclinations; and that is why their beliefs were really strong. God was the center of everything in the community; and the members of it believed that God guided their steps. In this way, each religious congregation held in town was directed toward almighty God. Puritans read the Scriptures, and they were very devoted to the Bible. They were very strict concerning the messages of the Bible and they emphasized them to make people adhere to the principles inherent in them. The message of the Bible had to be respected and followed by the townspeople.

The fact that the Bible had been translated into English helped them to survive spiritually in the New World. Their duty as citizens was to go to church every Sunday; and, if they wanted to, they could go there other days. They had to listen to a minister for hours giving speeches about salvation or condemnation. Of course, ministers took as the theme of each speech different circumstances or aspects of their community to make everyone realize the good or evil of each



action and the consequences of it. They felt the necessity to be connected to and to serve God because of their belief that each human being existed to praise and fear him.

They also thought humanity had to assess the fact that Jesus died on the cross because of the original sin of Adam and Eve in the very beginning of creation. Moreover, the only way to honor Him was to live their lives according to what God disposed of in the Bible; so, they tried to follow the Scriptures and to please God no matter what because they believed Jesus was only killed by some people, not by everybody on Earth. Besides, God gave his only son's life for the chosen people and not for all humanity. Puritans educated each member of the community to read and interpret the Bible because to them the Bible was essential for life. If they followed the teachings of Jesus, they could be forgiven by God for the original sin committed by Adam and Eve against Almighty God. Puritans believed they had a passport to heaven by being elected by God for salvation. They worked to take off the sin which was carried on their shoulders from the time they were born.

Puritans believed God had a special plan for each member of the Puritan community. According to them, each human being was elected, from the time he or she was born, to be saved or condemned; in this way, people could not change their destiny by themselves because their path was chosen by God. Moreover, they did not agree with the "free will" concept backed up by the Catholic Church. The Puritan belief in election was known as predestination.



The question is, why did everyone in the town have to go to church if members were condemned or saved already?

“Members of the Church devoted themselves to God's laws hoping for direct proof of His blessing– a personal experience of salvation.” (Rogers 16)

Puritans believed they had to look for some bread crumbs in the path of their lives by going to church, praying, working hard, and performing good actions in the community; those actions would bring the grace of God on the elected person, although it could not change their destiny. It was a kind of demonstration to each member of the town that they were very good people; and in that way, they were elected by God to go to Paradise.

In a Puritan community, it was easy to understand who the elected man or woman was. According to Puritans, if a person attended church, worked hard, and demonstrated that he or she had a good soul, that person was chosen to go to Heaven. On the other hand, if a person was lazy, immoral, and did not go to church, she or he was elected to go to Satan's place or to the Black man's place (as Puritans referred to Satan). God's election of good and evil souls was the theme of all the sermons in the church of the Puritans; and as was said before, the sermons lasted hours and were about different occurrences in the town. That is why each Puritan had hope and fear at the same time because they constantly thought about the day of their Judgment before God. The minis-



ters wanted everyone to know the difference between good and evil actions, and the punishment or the reward of God according to those actions.

Aside from reading the Bible, the people who wanted to be elected to go to Heaven and saved by God had to make a covenant with Him; this covenant was called The Covenant of Grace. This kind of pact between God and His people consisted of receiving forgiveness for all the sins a person had committed during his or her life. Because of the hope of this covenant, Puritans tried to live their lives in peace and tried to follow the patterns of keeping their lives on the right track indicated by God in the Bible. In this way, we can imagine why Puritans were so deep in their faith and were fanatical with respect to their religion; they were just looking for their own salvation, the salvation God had promised them through His covenant.

That is why the Puritan religion had so many rules and prohibitions concerning their behavior in England and New England. They were against dancing, partying, or drinking. They believed they were summoning evil and Satan through that kind of behavior; they were sinning against God instead of praising him. They wanted to abolish any kind of behavior which was against their own beliefs and thoughts. It is necessary to remember that they mixed political rules with religion, so religion dominated all the political aspects of the community.

If a person committed any crime, he or she was considered to have broken the laws established by the community and to have sinned against God's wishes and commandments. This was the reason the penalties imposed by them were



so cruel and harsh; perhaps they wanted to make everyone aware of the penalties prepared for the ones who sinned and disobeyed God. For example, Puritans believed that marriage was God's will, and everyone had to respect it until the end of their lives. They thought adultery was not part of God's plan, and they punished it by death. In the same way, fornication was also punished by whipping the sinner mercilessly.

They wanted to eradicate all the evil and bad behavior in England and New England to gain salvation and the eternal life offered by God. Nevertheless, in the pursuit of it they often destroyed everything God had given them in the New World. They created harsh and cruel rules against their own towns and made the lives of some Puritan people a complete nightmare. Perhaps the rules imposed by them were followed only by some, and perhaps penalties were not applied to all in an equal way. Perhaps. The economic factor could save some people from being hung or whipped; in short, perhaps everything could change in the society if money or position influenced the magistrates. It is an interesting supposition although we have no proof of such occurrences.

### 3.2 Hawthorne's own perspective.

Puritans were so extremely religious that they became fanatics in their own religion. The Scarlet Letter contains details of how religiously Puritans acted and how harsh their attitudes were against any transgression committed in the town. As was already said, Puritans combined their religion and judicial laws to supposedly create a life without sin and accomplish God's plan for humans on



Earth. Puritans basically wanted to follow their established patterns and be forgiven by God to enjoy Heaven when they passed away. However, Nathaniel Hawthorne expressed his own feelings towards Puritanism. From the beginning of the novel, The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne points out his feelings and thoughts about the Puritan ethic.

In the introduction of the novel, in the chapter called “The Custom House”, Nathaniel Hawthorne expresses some feelings concerning his ancestors’ behavior towards sinners.

“...he had all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil.” (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 41)

Hawthorne states that his first ancestor was a person who had Puritanism flowing all through his veins. When the author mentions “good and evil”, what is he trying to say? In this part of the book, Hawthorne made the readers notice Puritan people were not different from others. Puritans made mistakes although many Puritans believed they were good people who had never committed any sin during their lives. However, why did Hawthorne not use some other word instead of “evil”? Perhaps he wanted to express his rejection of the cruel ways of the Puritans in punishment for sin against God. He perhaps believed that those terrible circumstances made Puritans, and his religion, evil. Perhaps the cruelty of Puritans towards a sinner was a kind of profanation against God instead of a way to maintain God’s justice in the world. Perhaps Puritans should



have trusted God to punish the sinner, in some cases, instead of going against God's law of Love. Harsh punishment is not the message of a New Testament.

He also described, in "The Custom House" (page 16), his first ancestor<sup>1</sup> with some negative adjectives such as "dim" and "dusky". According to Hawthorne, the characters of the Puritan members of his family were often dim and dusky, or, in other words, they were narrow-minded and cold. He continued with the same descriptions for the Puritans in the rest of the novel giving them dark, and grim characteristics. According to his own words in the novel, he made the reader realize that although Puritans, or his forefathers, could have carried out good actions in the community or towards their fellows, they stained those actions with the cruelties performed by them.

Hawthorne's perspective of the religion of his ancestors is evident in the following passage:

"At all events, I, the present writer, as their representative, hereby take shame upon myself for their sakes" (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 41)

Hawthorne is obviously against the Puritan beliefs of his forefathers. He felt embarrassment over their behavior and concerning the terrible consequences of the fanatic resolutions they adopted in the town. He also thought Puritans, with all their rules and supposed sanctity, corrupted their souls in their search

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<sup>1</sup>William Hathorne (1607 – 1681), who immigrated to America in 1630 with the founding members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.



for salvation; all the bad temper and bad decisions turned them into evil human beings instead of good people.

Hawthorne's thoughts made him feel uncomfortable about the decisions his ancestors had made in the name of God; that is why he wrote the paragraph above. Those were the words, ideas, and thoughts that existed in his mind. The reader understands that Hawthorne had Puritan blood in his veins; however, he was not proud of his ancestors.

In "The Custom House" Hawthorne recognizes that Puritans were cruel people who wanted to purge those who disagreed with their beliefs and ideas. He gave some examples of the lack of tolerance among Puritan people, his forefathers, when he narrated the chasing of a Quaker woman by his first ancestor, and the judging and participation in a witch trial by another one.

"From the beginning of this great novel, Hawthorne set forth his perspective and ideas concerning the Puritan society and doctrine, which, according to the text, made him feel shame for his ancestors' actions which he considered ruthless and horrible." (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 40)

Nathaniel Hawthorne continued expressing his own ideas about Puritanism in the following chapter. For example, he clearly exposed his contrary feelings and thoughts against Puritans when he mentioned Ann Hutchinson as "sainted". Of





course, this causes the reader to think he thought she was not doing or saying anything wrong; maybe he believed it had not been fair to exile her from the community. Hawthorne expressed the opposite of what his ancestors thought about her. He considered her a saint. Puritans had felt hatred towards her in believing she was a threat to their religion, beliefs, and town. He also made the reader question whether Puritans were right in condemning her. He seemed to believe they were wrong. It is clear that the author's perspective differed from that of the Puritans.

He continued using some adjectives to describe Puritans; their faces reflected their souls and their feelings. In Chapter Two Hawthorne expressed the following opinion:

“... the grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies of these good people would have augured some awful business in hand. It could have betokened nothing short of the anticipated execution of some noted culprit, on whom the sentence of a legal tribunal had but confirmed the verdict of public sentiment.” (N. Hawthorne and Connolly 77)

As can be seen, Hawthorne continued to describe the Puritans in the same way as in the First Chapter. As he said, the faces of the people showed the rigidity of their laws; maybe they were acting cruelly because they were really angry at the person who had committed a crime in the town. Their faces could show their



feelings towards the criminal or towards the sinner's punishment; maybe they expected that person to be castigated with all the severity of the laws. In the same chapter, Hawthorne uses some examples of that severity and expresses his opinion of it. He said that during those days cruel punishments were considered necessary and transcendental in their lives in order to banish crime, violence, and sin; however, while he was writing the story he denounced such actions as being obsolete and excessive. Once again, he was criticizing Puritan behavior as based on their religious beliefs.

“The community in which he abides certainly shows a commendable lack of suspicion towards him: even old Mistress Hibbins whose scent for moral carrion was as keen as that of a modern society journal, can scarcely credit her own conviction. “ (J. Hawthorne “The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne” 2)

Moreover, in Chapter Three, Hawthorne expressed that the community itself was unable to discover who the sinner along with Hester was. He was opposed to that kind of behavior from people who had elected ministers to be God's emissaries on Earth to help people to get salvation.

“But Dimmesdale's social position, as well as his personal character, seems to raise him above the possibility of such a lapse“ (J. Hawthorne “The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne” 2)



Nathaniel Hawthorne, of course, did not approve of that kind of behavior. As was said before, money, position, and social life could interfere with the beliefs of such a harsh religion and the laws connected to it. Of course, in those times, when a person was a minister or had a position in the church he was considered a person who had the gift of God to forgive sinners; nobody could think of him as a sinner or as a transgressor against the law or against almighty God himself. Besides Hawthorne rejected more than that; he rejected the hypocrisy of Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. Hawthorne described him as a young man with some characteristics that gave him the touch of a human being like everybody else, but not as a person elected by God, as the Puritans supposed. One more time, he made the public realize his disagreement with the concepts and ideas of Puritans towards the people who were members of the church; to Puritans, their ministers were angels; to Hawthorne they were persons who could make mistakes like anyone else.

During the rest of the story more of Hawthorne's opposing ideas appeared. In Chapter Five, Hester Prynne had to experience different and terrible moments of her life; she had to stand before people who were condemning her for what she had done. Hawthorne explained how even Puritan children yelled at her and her little child. He explained that almost everyone in the community had a scarlet letter hidden in their bosoms, but Puritans believed a letter was needed to punish a sinner in order to please God and make others think about what was not permitted in the town. Here again, Hawthorne exposed the hypocritical feelings of the Puritans. They sought to expose and castigate the sinner, but were



blind to their own amoral staff. Hawthorne revealed that nobody in the community was a saint; nobody was perfect; and almost no one was applying true Christian rules.

Nathaniel Hawthorne also said how cruel Puritans acted when they started using Hester as the model of transgression, elected to go to hell because of her offense against God. He also said that evidence of sin and errors of humans could always be exposed at any time since to err is the nature of humanity; he just wanted to point out that there was no difference between Puritans and other people because all human beings are the same; imperfect people with guilt and secret faults within their hearts.

Moreover, Hawthorne presented a question to the reader and to himself. How could a community as harsh as that of the Puritans establish such standards which could reject a person in all possible instances for a sin, but accept the work of the same person on almost every occasion except for weddings? One more time, Hawthorne expressed his rejection of Puritan hypocrisy and negative attitudes against people who according to Puritans were sinners. He revealed how it was possible for Hester to be yelled at, criticized, pointed to, and humiliated most of the time, but when they needed her needle work and her dedication, they could erase from their minds what they had done to her over a long period of time. It seemed that personal interests were more powerful than the supposed laws of God expressed in the Bible. The Puritans could get what they wanted while being the cruel and insensitive people they demonstrated themselves to be.



In Chapter Thirteen, the author makes the reader decide which the worst sin is: to be unfaithful in marriage or to cruelly attack the soul and the mind of a person silently? Nathaniel Hawthorne gives his own point of view in the chapter by saying that Hester's adultery occurred because Hester never loved Roger. Also Roger abandoned her for two years. Hawthorne shows his opposite thoughts and feelings with respect to Roger Chillingworth's actions against Arthur Dimmesdale. Although Chillingworth did not hurt the Reverend physically, he hurt Arthur psychologically. The physician found a better way to attack and destroy the lover of his wife; as he worked for the reverend, he discovered all the weaknesses and fears Dimmesdale had inside his heart. In this way, Nathaniel Hawthorne gave his own perspective, different from the Puritan view; Hawthorne thought Hester's infidelity was not as great a sin as the heartless attitude displayed by Chillingworth in this cruel game against Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. In short, the author believed the worst sin was not infidelity at all. To him it seemed that Chillingworth's desire for revenge and his manner of obtaining it in destroying Dimmesdale's mind and heart was a much worse sin than Hester's.

In Chapter Fifteen the author talks about Hester's marriage, and once again he has a different point of view from that of the Puritans'. He thinks perhaps Hester made a huge mistake when she got married to a man who was not the object of her heart. According to Nathaniel Hawthorne, the betrayal of a person's own heart is the worst crime that any person can commit. At this point, he makes the audience think and find a personal answer to the following question: is it worse



to marry someone who you are not in love with? Or is it worse to love someone who is not allowed to you? The answer depends on the reader's mind and own opinion. Of course, the author suggests that Hester's crime in getting married to Roger was nothing in comparison to Roger Chillingworth's cruel treatment of Arthur. According to Hawthorne, Hester did not sin against God; she just followed her feelings; if she did sin, it was but against her inner emotions.

Certainly this is the state of the novel half way through. Hester comes off as an innocent person as compared to Roger Chillingworth. However, at the end of the novel, Hester seems to have judged herself as a true sinner. She decided, at the end, to continue wearing the scarlet letter to do penance and get into God's good graces.



## CHAPTER 4: CONTRASTS IN THE FEMALE CHARACTERS

The Scarlet Letter deals with different social issues. It offers the reader different situations to establish a point of view regarding the circumstances described in the story. One important topic in the novel is the treatment of females in the society of the Puritans.

### 4.1 The Puritan Treatment of Females

Women are very important in every society because they ensure the existence of future generations and family strength. In addition, women are very important in other ways. However, women have been treated as inferior to men over the course of history in spite of the fact that they have demonstrated their essential equality to men. During Puritan times women were treated as inferior to men because of Eve's role in Original Sin.

Puritans had their own way of acting and treating people in society. Sinners were severely punished in the Puritan colony. The leaders and the townspeople wanted to castigate them to make them pay for their bad actions and attitudes. Aside from this negative pattern, Puritans were very hardworking people who had their own ideas and perspectives about society, family, women, and children.



As was already said, Puritans had their rules for society, and they formed their families with ideas they took from the Bible. They thought a marriage could only end when one of the spouses passed away or committed adultery. These were the most important motives to end such a union.

Women did not have the place they have in modern days; they were treated in some ways which differed from men. First of all, women were considered as the weaker sex because of the fall of Eve at the beginning of the creation when she caused Adam to disobey God and sin against Him. For that reason, women were not allowed to speak in public or give any kind of opinion in the church; only men were permitted to express their ideas, opinions, and feelings in public. According to this attitude, women were clearly seen as the greatest sinners of the world and the ones who would possibly cause everyone to commit any transgression.

Moreover, women were not allowed to express their thoughts and opinions openly with respect to politics, as members of the church, and in society in general. In this way, the female population was held inferior to the men. Men created the situation of women through their beliefs; Puritan men believed that knowledge, intelligence, and the power of words were the rights only of the male members of their society. This was a very low thought which made women feel it was a necessary evil even to have children and to take care of their husbands.





Puritan men thought hard jobs were made for men and the lighter works for women; that is why they conferred works such as raising and looking after children, washing clothes, cleaning the house, and milking the cows to women. However, if you think about it, those activities were not easy at all; they were hard and really difficult to manage, but undervalued by some people who thought woman's place was in the home.

In this way, all the female children were trained to become housewives when they grew up; that was their destiny from the time they were born. They were expected to follow the same steps as their mothers at home and in the colony. This raises the question of what these girls thought about other life expectations aside from motherhood and housewifery?

Leaving behind the treatment of women as mothers and housekeepers, it is necessary to think about women's place in religion. As was already said, women were not allowed to speak in church, but how were they considered aside from being thought of as inferior to men?

Puritans believed in predestination and salvation, they used to think men and women could go to hell or heaven; however, they believed women were more susceptible than men to be tempted by Satan. Women more than men could become witches and serve the black man and his evil ways instead of serving almighty God.



“They preached that unreformed sinners who served the devil rather than God were doomed, and they peppered their sermons with images of hell’s dark abys.”

(Reis 4)

Satan’s servants were condemned from the very moment they started to doubt God and believe in the devil. The ministers were in charge of telling the members of the community about the punishment they would receive if they lost their way. As was said before, they used everything that happened in the community as an example for their speeches, and made the citizens think about how Satan tried to change their minds and make them become sinners and transgressors. In this way, women were considered weaker than men with respect to being and becoming evil people, because, since the beginning of life —a woman—, Eve, sinned and believed in Satan. Being a woman in that colony meant being considered as capable of betraying God.

“Accused women were damned if they did and damned if they didn’t: if they confessed to witchcraft charges, their admissions would prove the cases against them; if they denied the charges, then their very intractability, construed as the refusal to admit to sin more, generally could mark them as sinners and hence allies of the devil. Thus, although Puritan theology held that women and men would be equal before God and the devil, the mundane world mediated those tenets, making it easier



for Puritans to imagine that women were more likely than men to submit to Satan and become witches”.

(Reis 5)

As can be seen, women were treated as the more vulnerable of the race, capable of adoring Satan. Men could not conceive that they— men- could also be susceptible to being tempted to break God’s laws. They saw women as the inferior and weaker sex who maybe did not deserve to be in heaven but rather in hell; perhaps men saw themselves as the pure side of human kind that would not be confused by the devil because they were stronger in their beliefs. In short, the female population was oppressed, damned, condemned, and in some cases killed by their male mates.

#### 4.2. Hester in the beginning versus Hester at the end of the book.

The Scarlet Letter has well developed contrasting characters that show a lot of different traits all during the story. One of them is Hester Prynne, the main character of the novel; she ended up as a very strong woman who changed her way of seeing and acting in life after all the suffering and pain she went through for her love of a man who was not her husband.

At first, Hester can be seen as a weak woman who is really afraid for her life and her child’s. She tried to forget all the people who were staring at her in the market place because she felt really bad; in that moment, she started remembering all her past from the time she lived with her family. After being humiliated



and offended by all the people who believed they were better than her, she was taken back to the prison where she got sick.

Moreover, she remained in silence after talking with her husband, Roger Chillingworth. She was afraid of telling the truth one more time, and she was not strong enough to avoid future consequences such as the psychological torture of Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale by Roger Chillingworth to get revenge against Dimmesdale.

During the entire story, Hester did not try to rebel or get revenge on the people who were cruel to her. At the same time, she also refused to go to the forest with Mistress Hibbins to adore Satan and curse all the people in the town.

“Her silent suffering eventually wins the sympathy of others but still fails to gain her complete acceptance by the Puritan society that surrounds her.” (Sauder “The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne”)

Instead she decided to bear her punishment in order to try to be accepted by the town again; she felt in her heart that this was correct. In this way, she showed her repentance and her awareness of her own conscience about the wrong decision she had made. Besides, her heart remained good and warm-hearted full of kindness, love, and repentance. She turned into a better woman who was strong enough to tear down the walls of hatred and treason that she encountered.



“Not only does Hester change mentally, but she also changes physically. The warmth, charm and passion which she once possessed appears to have been replaced by coldness, severity, and drabness.”

(123Helpme)

Later, Hester could be seen sometimes as devastated and destroyed at first sight; she looked so different from what she was once. She changed her appearance by putting her hair up, and she showed a sad face; she hid her beauty so that it seemed to be lost. Hester’s external look seemed that of a woman who had to accept the rules of a society which she disagreed with totally, and she had no other choice but to submit to what God and society had determined for her.

“By freezing her world into a small circle containing only Pearl and herself, she shields the two of them from the mockery of a moralistic and cold society.”(Sauder “The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne”)

She could set herself and her daughter apart from mean and ruthless people who tried to make her and Pearl feel shame in front of such of a good and pure society where all the magistrates, reverends, and other people believed they were chosen by God to enjoy paradise and a good life.



All the situations she went through made her change her way of thinking and her treatment of everyone. She tried to help people in need, although at first the citizens had bad opinions about her; she did not mind that they did not like her. Besides, she demonstrated to everyone who condemned and criticized her that she was not a bad woman; during the following years she changed the feelings and thoughts people had about her and the scarlet letter. The letter “A” changed meaning from ADULTERER to meaning ANGEL or Able; and at the end, the townspeople accepted Hester.

“A little more than half way through the novel, Hester has changed into a woman capable of helping others and of being respected by them. Society has now forgiven her and some may even admire her.”  
(123Helpme)

Perhaps she was good all the time; and she became a better woman, someone just like an angel. She demonstrated all the goodness of her soul, heart, and mind; and everyone in town started to forget about what she had done.

Aside from Hester’s relationship with the townspeople, Hester proved her repentance and her will to change the way women were treated in those days. She changed the normal pattern of behavior of a woman who had sinned and broken all the established rules; she rejected the idea of being mean and evil by refusing to hurt people by going to the forest with Mistress Hibbins to adore Satan; instead she spent her time with Pearl, taking care of her, and having a life



full of kindness, having a good heart to help and serving her community, whenever possible, to receive forgiveness and pardon.

“Hester learns from her sin, and she grows strong as a result of accepting her punishment.” (123Helpme)

She was willing to fight for what she believed and loved; she was prepared to run away and forget all the past, tears, and suffering caused by a coward who was the love of her life. The mistake she made turned her into a stronger person and a woman who recognized her guilt, and the fact that she had to pay a big penalty for it.

“In her public and private suffering, symbolized by the scarlet letters in her life, Hester remains a pillar of strength.” (Sauder “The Scarlet Letter b Nathaniel Hawthorne”)

Although she had many difficulties, privately and publicly, due to her weakness, she never allowed cruelty, treason, and punishment to destroy her life and her own scarlet letter in the flesh, Pearl. However, she could never forget her sin because people constantly reminded her that she was guilty; the letter on her bosom and her own daughter showed her sin to be real.

Finally, it is clear that at the end, Hester was a different woman from what she was at the beginning of the story; all her beauty was hidden, and her repent-



ance made her be a better and stronger human being willing to fight for her happiness, and to build the family she longed for.

#### 4.3 Puritan versus modern women.

As was already said, The Scarlet Letter is a historical romantic novel which tells a story about an important group of people from the United States, the Puritans. They were very strong people with strong beliefs and thoughts.

They were hard-tempered people who wanted to eradicate sin from the land where they lived and from all the Earth if they could. This Puritan society was composed of strong and cruel men; and they felt they could judge everyone just as if they were God. Men in the community also taught children to internalize all thoughts about life and sin. They were accustomed to the hard situations and beliefs that they had to deal with at every moment during their lives from the time they were children.

Nevertheless, men and children were not the only ones who thought and felt in that way; women also had cruel feelings, even against their own sex, and in this case against Hester.

In the beginning of the novel Hawthorne gives the audience a total view of how women behaved and looked during Puritan times. He describes them as chubby and broad shouldered, women who seemed to be very strong. Their physical appearance was tough and very different from that of Hester in various ways.





They wore gray colored clothes to avoid catching the attention of the rest of the members of the community; they only followed rules. In contrast, Hester wore beautiful, embroidered clothes that caught the attention of everyone in town. She was so different from the women in the village that maybe they felt envy of her beauty and fashionable dresses. The dresses were long and puffy to cover the body from the neck to the toes. Women also wore a head-dress over their heads with their hair tied up.

On the contrary, modern women try to keep fit and not gain weight. They want to be thin and healthy by following a strict pattern of eating, and by going to the gym. At first, modern women seem to be not that strong in their physical appearance, but they are strong. Moreover, modern women wear colorful and fashionable clothes which show joy and elegance at the same time. All women love to get attention and feel important and pretty. Nowadays, dresses do not try to cover the body of women at all.

“A girl should be two things: classy and fabulous,” Co-  
co Chanel once said.” (qtd. in New York Magazine  
“Chanel - Designer Fashion Label”)

Modern clothes for women are short colorful dresses which allow the legs to be the focus of attention of all the body. Modern women love to show skin and feel sexy and comfortable. Some women do not wear dresses; instead they like to wear pants, and beautiful long shirts which have some kind of color in common. Furthermore, women have different beautiful hair accessories to be used either



during the day or night. Those items consist of colorful bands or tiny colorful animal combs which are very much in demand by teenagers and young adults. Besides women like to straighten their hair as well as make it curly for any occasion for day-to-day looks.

Going back to Puritan times, Puritan women felt morally superior to Hester. When Hester was being humiliated in the market place by the entire town, the Puritan women wanted Hester to be branded for her bad behavior in their society. As was already said, maybe they felt Hester's attitude would make men think all women were unfaithful sinners like Hester. In spite of their treatment of her, Hester did not hate them; rather, she felt proud at the instant she got out from prison. She did not have hard feelings and thoughts towards them even though they wanted Hester to be punished.

Nowadays, women do not feel morally superior to other woman. Society does not punish infidelity or humiliate a person or condemn that person to death. Modern women have different thoughts about marriage and love. If a woman feels she is not happy, she finds another way to end her relationship well. She thinks divorce and good communication are needed to move on with her life. In this way, she would not worry about what could happen to her or her child; she is only concerned about getting peace and tranquility back into her life.

Furthermore, Puritan women were allowed to work only at home: they milked cows, cooked for their families, and looked after their children. They were undervalued by their soul mates and considered to be the only ones who could



manage home affairs. In the colonial period, men thought home making was easy to perform in society. Women could not have any other role as active members in the colony. They had to be submissive and to accept what the community decided concerning them; all that they could do was accept their position.

On the contrary, modern women do not feel their place is in the home. Women have won another place in society, and they have become an important part of it. They work in all kinds of jobs which, in the past, were considered only for men. They do not feel fulfilled only by cooking, taking care of children, or cleaning the house; they have other expectations of life and profession. That is why now you can find female architects, teachers, engineers, and doctors who are successful in their fields. Women also do not like to follow orders or be submissive to what people say and command. They have other ideas about their lives and expectations.

Moreover, they want to climb up in their own careers; they want to feel needed; they want to feel valued by the people who surround them in their professional and private lives. They do not agree with the old patterns of how women were treated in the old days.

Aside from this, Puritan women were not allowed to give their opinions about anything in the community. They were not considered as people who could offer anything extra in town; their beliefs and thoughts were not needed at all. Men believed God gave men all the power and wisdom; according to Puritans, intel-



ligence was only a male quality, something which was only given to this side of society. Women were not granted such a blessing according to male Puritans. Also, in the church, as well as in the town, reverends and ministers were the only ones who could make decisions in the colony to punish or reward people. Therefore, Puritan and modern women are very different; changes in women's character, personality, and fashion have been great. Women have new ways of behaving and acting in life; progress of women is so well known and widespread that everybody is aware of it.

#### 4.4 Hawthorne's beliefs concerning about women.

The Scarlet Letter is a novel of which the center of attention is a woman, Hester Prynne. This character changes during the novel through the perspective of the author who reveals his own thoughts about females.

When the story begins, Hawthorne talks about a woman who is being judged by the whole town because of a passionate affair she has had during the absence of her husband.

“Hawthorne goes and turns her into a heroine, clearly the strongest character in the book, possibly the only one with any virtuous strands whatsoever” (Lucia “Men and Women in Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter”)



At the beginning of the novel, Hawthorne describes a woman who is proud, facing the town with no remorse at all for what she has done. Perhaps Hawthorne wanted to express his feeling that women would change their behavior and their status in the world. Maybe he had moved on to recognize a new state of women; females in the future would act according to what they believe in their hearts and fight for it. In addition, Hawthorne wanted to say that it was time for women to break free and get out from under the shadow where men had placed them. If you think about it, well, he had a kind of reason. When he expressed how Hester felt after leaving the prison, he wanted to show the world that Puritan women were weak people who never could imagine being the center of anything or breaking rules, or not to lowering their heads, as they used to.

Doctor Richard Millington a professor of English at Smith College expresses:

“If we think about the stories in particular, we might notice that what's especially at issue (given the relative thinness of the female characters) is a consistent critique of a version of masculinity, in which male ambition seems to drive the treatment of the women and the repudiation of the values, typically associated with domestic life, they represent.”(qtd. in Hawthorne in Salem”)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, all through The Scarlet Letter, sets forth a type of special favoritism for femininity. His novel has different points of view about men and



their thoughts of being the perfect and blessed genre on Earth. Hawthorne shows that he had opposite feelings from most men; he constantly comments about men and their high ego and power. If you analyze the novel, you can notice his attacks against men. The entire novel is about a woman who is being punished by the Puritan town whose leaders are male Puritans who believed themselves the judges of everyone and everything in life.

He constantly talks about men as cruel, grim, and somber people who were proud of being men and who thought of themselves as pure as God. He also criticizes them when they decide to punish Hester by using the embroidered letter made by her; one more time, he does not agree with the way they make decisions in the name of God. In the same way, he says some men are even weaker than women when he describes the lover of Hester as a coward and weak man who could not fight for what he supposedly loved. On the contrary, he describes Hester as stronger than him; a person who declared she could bear her own shame, the shame of the father of her child, and the punishment of their actions as well. In this situation, he clearly established his preference for women and set forth the way he thought women would be some day.

“In many of his short works, Hawthorne has painted men as inferior beings, prone to obsession or excesses of pride, weak in heart and spirit, drunk with righteous, religious fervor, or in some cases plain evil.” (Lucia “Men and Women in Hawthorne’s Scarlet Letter”)



Their behaviors are criticized by Hawthorne who believes they were not that different from Hester. Hawthorne tells us during the novel that Hester feels that everybody in town has a scarlet letter on his/her chest because all of the people have sinned in some way. Of course their secrets were kept in the shadows; and he also implies the hypocrisy of situation. As was already said, money and position must have played an important role in the Puritans' way of judging and controlling people; it was said Mistress Hibbins was the sister of the Governor; and she was considered as a witch by the town. However, she was not touched or judged by any Puritan because she had power in the town, the power of the money of her family and the power of her brother as a governor of the community. One more time, in this case, Hawthorne implies how unfair the judges of the colony were; they were allowed to condemn a poor woman, but they could not do anything when it was the case of judging a powerful and wealthy woman; the religion and laws created by those men were blind.

Aside from this, another proof of Hawthorne's preference for women expressed in The Scarlet Letter is the way Hawthorne describes the accused woman in the novel. He uses the best adjectives to give the audience an image of Hester; he says she is beautiful in every detail of her body. He compares her hair with the shining of the sun, and the beauty of her face with the Virgin Mary. Analyzing this description, you can think about the image Hawthorne had about the real essence of women aside from the picture of the rest of Puritan women. Perhaps he thinks women were better than their male mates; he could think women were greater in spirit and had much more to give to the world. That is why he writes a novel in which a woman is the central and most important character. Hester



goes through an enormous change in the novel, and is very different from the people in her town. She also has a different point of view about love, sex, religion, and life style. This is how Hawthorne pictures a woman, Pearl, to the reader.

“Like nature and animals, she is anterior to moral law; but, unlike them, she is human, too. She exhibits an un-failing vigor and vivacity of spirits joined to a precocious and almost preternatural intelligence, especially with reference to her mother's shameful badge.”(J. Hawthorne “The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne 3)

Moreover, Hawthorne compares Pearl with the beauty of nature. He describes her just like her mother: beautiful, elegant, and with great passion inside her. Once again, she is so different from the other Puritans. She, as well as her mother, does not want to conform to what life offers them. Instead Hester and Pearl try to live their lives according to what they believe, feel, and think; that is why, when Hester changed into a sad woman because of what she felt, she looked different from the woman she once was. She was afraid Pearl had some evil within her; maybe, she thought her existence and Pearl's would be terrible because of the way of thinking of the Puritans. She loved her daughter, and she was scared of what destiny would prepare for her if they disobeyed the rules of the colony.





Nathaniel Hawthorne also says the forest was the only place where Pearl and her mother would be in peace without any oppression of the town. In this case, he expresses that the essence of women is the same as nature: quiet, peaceful, beautiful, wild, and passionate with respect to the rest of the inhabitants of the world. According to him, women's inner nature, just as the forest, scared the Puritans, maybe because male Puritans thought women were nothing more than house-keepers and reproductive machines.

Nevertheless, what was the reason that Hawthorne seemed to be a feminist in The Scarlet Letter? Why would he do that? The answer to these questions could be hidden inside his own home, inside his own family. The death of his father would change all the views of his life because he grew up surrounded by women, his sisters and mother. Perhaps he learned that women were more than cooks, dairy women, or house-keepers; and they would be the people who supported him in his life and career.

“Because his father had died when Hawthorne was four years old, he grew up living with a wide variety of womanhood: His aunt, Mary Manning, a practical if unlettered woman, started him on his career as a writer by suggesting that all his aunts and uncles pool their resources to help pay for his college education at Bowdoin College. “(Ponder “Hawthorne and “the sphere of ordinary womanhood””)



Perhaps he learned to value the women in his life more because they showed him they could contribute with so many things to the people and the town; they also could help him with different contributions in each instance of his own life, such as love, moral support for his writings, money, etc. He realized women were better than what the Puritans thought of them.

“Because of various circumstances in his childhood, Hawthorne grew up amidst the "infinite variety" of talented and supportive females of his childhood family (Moore 233). They set the pattern for the women who followed them; with their quick minds, love of reading and writing and responsive minds and hearts, they were Hawthorne's first collaborators, ideal readers, editors, marketing agents, and emotional and financial supporters” (Ponder “Hawthorne and "the sphere of ordinary womanhood"")

As can be seen, Hawthorne was raised by intelligent, caring, and passionate women. His perspective of women was different from that of the Puritans.

“With a "poetical temperament," Elizabeth Hawthorne was "highly cultivated by reading," "intelligent...and lively...." (Moore quoting Elizabeth Palmer Peabody 68-70)--the perfect mother to foster and share her son's



creative imagination and love of language.” (Ponder  
“Hawthorne and "the sphere of ordinary womanhood")

His mother would be the perfect example of a woman who had an intelligent interest in something else aside from the home staff. She, as one of the most important people in his life, would of course influence him in some ways. This influence, of course, would be indirect; it means she demonstrated to her own son that she had some other skills and interests in life, aside from the normal duties of women performed by his ancestors, the Puritans.

“Since Hawthorne's days before his marriage were spent in writing, walking and chatting with Elizabeth, she played a central role in his development as a writer, with her own interest in the imagination, psychology and aesthetics expanding his.” (Ponder “Hawthorne and "the sphere of ordinary womanhood"”

This would be the most important reason why he defended women and had a feminist attitude in The Scarlet Letter. His own mother was different from other women since she had characteristics showing she was not unequal to males. She could think, feel, love, fight and face the world for her children or for what she believed. That strength must have influenced Nathaniel, making him understand the real nature of women; it enabled him to picture Hester as he did with great beauty, force, and passion within. In short, his mother was the perfect



model of a strong woman. She must have shown him the other side of women apart from their position in society and their place at home.

#### 4.5. Sex and love, the conceptions of then and now.

Sex has been a theme of discussion in all societies since the beginning of time. It has been considered as a sin by some societies, especially in ancient times all over the world, and still in some societies nowadays.

One of the most important issues in The Scarlet Letter is sex outside of marriage, a forbidden thing for a woman who was married. According to the story, Hester was humiliated, oppressed, and punished for having a child who was not the daughter of her husband. Pearl was thought to be the result of her mother's lust and high passions which caused Pearl to be pointed at by the Puritans. In the market place, when she was walking out from prison, Hester was not embarrassed by what she had done until she saw the Puritans staring at her as if she were the most evil person that ever lived. She felt so bad that she started thinking about her past.

Even women accused her of her sin; they also wanted to place a brand over her forehead because they thought her sin was a sin against God. They could not bear to think about what the actions of Hester could cause in the male dominated society of Puritans. They were afraid men would point to every woman as a potentially unfaithful woman.



According to the novel, if a woman committed adultery, she had to be punished by death or by the wearing of a brand from a hot iron. In this case, Hester was punished by wearing an embroidered scarlet red letter on her chest. Thus, everybody in town would realize she had broken the rules and had an affair with a man who was not married to her.

As was said before, the story is a historical romantic novel, so it tells the kinds of things that happened in that society. The fact that a woman, a member of the Puritan society, had sexual intercourse with a man who was not her husband was considered a direct offence against God and His commandments. The Puritans felt the offense was so great that the woman needed to be severely castigated.

Her sin caused Hester to be cast out from the community; she had to spend many years in the area between the forest and the town far from all the other Puritans because they thought she should not live close to them. Puritans felt so angry about adultery that they thought it necessary to remove the sinner from proximity to the blessed people.

That is why they acted the way they did with Hester; maybe they felt ashamed of her because she was an example of a Fallen Woman who had not lived up to the Pure Ideal Woman that was the model for women in the Puritan colony.



According to the Puritans, sex was only permitted within marriage because God placed Adam and Eve together under His eye. Puritans could enjoy this act, of course, with their wives but it could not interfere with God's commandments.

“There was just one limitation which the Puritans placed upon sexual relations in marriage: sex must not interfere with religion. Man's chief end was to glorify God, and all earthly delights must promote that end, not hinder it.” (Jstor)

As is seen all actions had to be focused on praising God and respecting his words and commands; they could have sex at any time but it could not be an obstacle to the church and its laws. Religion was above any other circumstance or pleasure.

To emphasize, the main duty of Puritans on Earth was to obey God, respect his laws, and obey them no matter what. For them, all that they did must move in that direction, even sex. Maybe they thought sex was a great act that brought great satisfaction; and it only could be given to people on Earth by the Supreme One who gave them the amazing things, they had, by God.

“On other occasions, when food, drink, and recreation were allowable, sexual intercourse was allowable too, though of course only between persons who were married to each other.” (Morgan 594)



They had the power of prohibiting some actions, such as sexual intercourse, drinking, dancing, or listening to music. If they wanted, they could keep everyone from performing those actions during certain days of the year. Moreover, they could also allow everybody to dance, drink with moderation, and have sexual intercourse with their mates in marriage.

In this way, you can notice even that intimate acts were sometimes prohibited in that town. As Puritans were so strong in their beliefs and customs, they had to respect the commands of their authorities; of course, nobody knows to what extent they disobeyed the orders in the secrecy of their homes.

Therefore it could be said that Puritans saw sex as a natural act of humans. However, they were able to resist the pleasures of the flesh for the reason of their existence on Earth, God. Moreover, imagine how religious those people were due to the fact that they had the will to leave behind their activities, such as drinking wine, eating food, or having sex.

“In other words, sexual intercourse was a human necessity and marriage the only proper supply for it” (Morgan 593).

Furthermore, Puritans considered sex a main necessity for each human being. Feeling pleasure was not an evil action to them; on the contrary, it was the most natural act between two people joined under marriage. Of course, they did not



want to sin so they thought they could have sexual relations without any guilt, but only with the wife given to them by God.

However, think about it just a little bit; if they felt sex was a need for them, and they could have it only within marriage, did they get married just to have free sexual intercourse without any remorse? Did they have any feelings for their wives? Maybe they didn't; if they got married just for sex, maybe they did not love their mates. Maybe marriage was not a union between two people who loved each other; perhaps it was a union of two people who had to get married to have sex.

“Sex was supposed to be confined to marriage and offenders were punished severely--both parties were punished but the men more severely than the women.”

(Roe “The Puritans”)

As can be seen, marriage had to be performed before sex was possible; so they had to get married to be allowed to have sex. They could be castigated by the people of the town if they had any sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

Most people think Puritans were not people who proposed marriage just because they wanted to or who had arrangements with the family of the future wife.





“The Puritans married for love--there were no arranged marriages.” (Roe “The Puritans”)

According to this article, Puritans could feel anything for a woman and get married to her for love. It says arranged marriages were not possible for them, but unions for love because feelings were the main element in deciding whether or not to get married.

However, the novel expresses the contrary, in some chapters, to the above thoughts. If The Scarlet Letter is a Romantic-Historical novel, it transmits information to the reader. The novel says Hester had an affair with another man who was not her husband. It also says her husband was not good-looking at all, and he was also older than Hester. It gives the reader an idea of why he got married to Hester even though he was not the right one for her. It describes a man who needed company in his life, and he decided Hester was the perfect woman to be with him because she was beautiful and young, the opposite of him. At this point, the reader can notice Hawthorne is suggesting something about the marriages among Puritans. He shows love was not always the main element for a couple who decided to get married in the community of Puritans. The author manifests that Puritans got married sometimes because they wanted company, or they wanted a home. According to this criterion, love did not always exist between the bride and the groom. Puritans sometimes needed someone who could be there when they needed that person.



“Toward sexual intercourse outside marriage the Puritans were as frankly hostile as they were favorable to it in marriage.” (Morgan 594)

Sex without marriage was not allowed in the community. Puritans were against this act if it did not occur in a matrimony. Puritans got really angry if someone disobeyed the laws. This meant Puritans could see sex as a natural performance under some circumstances, but as a real crime if it did not have the necessary parameters.

In this way, having sex with a person who was not the spouse was a crime. Puritans could be very cruel and vengeful if it was necessary to make the townspeople respect rules, laws, and commandments of God.

“They passed laws to punish adultery with death, and fornication with whipping.” (Morgan 594)

They castigated the rule breakers, and they did not have any compassion for them. That is why all Puritans had to fulfill the expectations of the magistrates in the town and avoid being penalized by them.

Furthermore, The Scarlet Letter shows the reader another way Puritans castigated an adulterer in their town. Hester was the clear example of it; although she was not killed, she was publicly humiliated with her baby in her arms. She



was exposed to the entire town and criticized by its members who felt morally superior to her.

Besides, she was forced to wear a scarlet red letter on her bosom which would show how evil and sinful she was. Everyone in town could recognize her at a glance at the letter, and avoid her at any time and circumstance. She was cast out and pointed to even by the children of the town for several years. They only saw her as an example of misbehavior and of what they must not do to keep from sinning against God.

Nowadays, things have changed a great deal in the world. People try to look for a perfect partner to marry and form a family; the couple wants to have a happy and good life with love and affection surrounding them. A lot of people even wait and wait for the one who will fulfill their expectations of life and love.

Now marriage normally has these parameters in most of the countries in the world. A man has to love his future wife, and she has to love him back. They are not forced to marry because their parents want them to be part of a special family for money or prestige. Even the social class of a person does not interfere with the happiness of a couple because it does not matter anymore. Everyone has the opportunity to marry the person they want and to pursue joy.

Adultery is committed by a lot of people as well as sexual intercourse out of marriage. Teenagers and adult people practice sex with people who are not their husbands or wives. Even the union of two people without marriage is being



conceived of in these days. These situations, which were considered crimes at some time in the past, are part of the lives of modern people who have changed their minds and are not afraid of being killed or whipped by the people of their town, city, or country.

Sex is also practiced without any remorse or fear of being punished; for this reason, in a lot of countries it is considered as natural as taking a nap. That is why governments have different family planning policies and sexual classes in schools. They want to avoid people getting any sexually transmitted diseases or getting pregnant without planning.

However, there are some exceptions that exist in modern times. In some parts of the world, some communities still have their rules about marriage and sex.

“From their teen days, they dream of getting married to their Prince Charming and happily ever after. Maybe this is the reason why love marriages are very popular in comparison to arranged marriages all over the world including India”. (Of-India)

In some countries parents arrange marriages according to the gifts of the family of the bride and/or the groom. For example, in India people give a large marriage dowry when their daughters get married. In this way, the parents and the bride and groom show they can support the family and form a family under those rules, without love. In this case, in India, economic status is very im-



portant with respect to marriage, and the opinion of the future spouse does not mean anything at all.

“These gifts can be luxurious items like cars, interior decoratives, home appliances, latest electronics or furnished apartments, apparels to every member of the family along with lots of money.” (Of-India)

Therefore, a woman of India must have a lot of money to get married to a man. Her family has to give the groom a lot of presents which represent a notable amount of the money they possess, so he can be happy and join in the traditional ceremony with the woman. Perhaps, if you do not have the necessary money, you cannot have a husband, children, or family.

“The concept of arranged marriages has been followed since time immemorial”.(Of-India)

Nevertheless, this is only a tradition in those countries which have to follow the original patterns of union of their ancestors. The tradition must be followed from generation to generation and the custom is not to be terminated. Thus, Indians must continue to have arranged marriages until maybe, someday, their authorities, parents, and society decide the system should not continue anymore.

Aside from arranged marriages, adultery is also punished severely in some parts of the planet. Some countries continue the old tradition of penalizing peo-



ple for the sin of betraying their husbands. If a woman is guilty of adultery, she is killed by throwing stones at her or by being hurt by the community members.

“The Holy Quran tells us that the adulterer or the adulteress is to be flogged one hundred stripes while being witnessed by some people.” (IslamWeb)

Islamic people are judged in that way; they can be whipped many times in front of people to have a more severe penalty for the actions committed. As can be appreciated, it is a severe crime in the Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Morocco, Iraq, Iran, etc. These countries, among others, have different laws which prohibit sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

Furthermore, castigating people through flogging is not enough. They have their own customs to deal with the kind of women and men who dare to do what they cannot.

“If the adulterer or adulteress is married, the penalty is stoning to death, according to certain strict conditions.”  
(IslamWeb)

Thus, the causing of death of people by throwing stones at them is a must for Muslims. Perhaps Muslims feel they can end the embarrassment caused by the transgressors and keep other people from committing adultery. Muslims believe that this kind of severe punishment is normal and not cruel.



It is a terrible crime to kill people for adultery and it is being criticized and rejected by almost all the countries in the world which have different policies. However, other nations cannot really do anything because those are the laws and old traditions of a group which still lives in the past.

Finally, sex out of marriage was a forbidden action for the members of the Puritan society. Even nowadays, some cultures believe that sex should not be allowed between married people and unmarried, or in any extra marital situation. Nevertheless, in most countries of the world sex outside of marriage is being practiced widely without any fears. Besides, the old tradition of arranging a marriage for convenience has changed to allow people to find and choose the correct mate for their lives; they are permitted to go on the path they decide is the best for them along with the person who fulfills their expectations and heart's desire.



## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In this work different ideas and points of view have been shown with respect to The Scarlet Letter. Aside from being a great and interesting novel, this is an ambiguous story which can be understood in different ways by the readers. All the characters in it form the perfect crew for such an amazing book. Each one of them is a well developed character. Aside from the characters, other elements come into play which makes the reader think this was a real story that actually happened. Moreover, the book is not a specific type of novel; The Scarlet Letter has elements of the Historical Novel and a Romance.

The novel has different elements, which can be considered as typical of a historical novel and a romance novel as well. On the one hand, the characteristics of a historical novel are a plot which is placed in a specific period of time and history and which shows the different conditions of that time. The Scarlet Letter has those elements; it is developed during Puritan times and talks about the customs of the people in the Puritan colony according to their way of living, their management of society, and their behavior. Puritans established rules by which to act and they enforced them every day. On the other hand, the novel can be considered as a romantic story too. As was said before, a romance novel has two main characters who love each other, and because of different circumstances, they go apart, but they try to get back together again. The Scarlet Letter revolves around love, which is prohibited because of the condition of the two people. He, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, is a minister in the Puritan church;





and she, Hester, is a woman who is married to a man who does not communicate with her. Arthur and Hester have a hidden affair which has a consequence, a child named Pearl. She is the proof of the guilt of her mother, and this is the reason the town punishes her. After that, the couple goes apart, but Hester tries to convince Dimmesdale to run away with her and finally be happy; however, her request is not accepted by her lover.

All the previous characteristics, with others mentioned in Chapter One, are the details required to catalog the story as a Romance Historical novel. The fact that it is set in a specific time of history, and has a prohibited love in which Hester tries to be happy and fight for her success, places this work in the category of the novel already mentioned.

Furthermore, every detail in the story has meaning, and each detail can have different connotations for the reader. For example, light and dark can be understood in different ways. Light can be considered as an evil thing because it shows the evil in the novel, such as the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom which represents the sin and wrong attitude towards God. In the same way, dark can be considered good because it represents the quiet and good puritans, and the place where bad behavior was changed into a good. These dark and light elements can also be understood in the traditional way; light shows goodness, in the form of Hester's scarlet letter which could represent "Angel" instead of Adulteress; and dark is interpreted as evil when the Puritans assumed that the forest, a dark place, was the place where Satan abided. Moreover, natural and supernatural characteristics are found in the book. The rosebush is a clear exam-



ple; it is a natural element because it is part of the natural world; however, it is a supernatural element as a symbol of the peace it offers the accused and sinful person bringing a sense of love and forgiveness.

Aside from these details, sun and moon are part of the story, too. For example, during the sunlight all things which are accepted and commanded are performed; everything can be seen and monitored by the Puritans. On the contrary, the night covers the prohibited actions of the community, such as the relation Dimmesdale and Hester had when they were side by side with their daughter one night.

Another example of contrast is civilization and wilderness. Civilization is seen as the place where all the purest and most blessed people live. In contrast, the wilderness is the place where no rules exist because of the commands of Satan. The Puritans believed that all evil thrived there.

Private and public guilt also exist in the novel. Hester was punished because of her bad behavior and attitude; nevertheless, Arthur had a private punishment. His own mind and heart penalized him and made him a weak and sick person. Besides, identity and society are found in the novel. For example, Arthur cannot find his own identity because he wants to have the best of both worlds; he wants Hester and he wants to continue being part of the church. He does not show this to the community, however, so that the rest of the Puritans see him as a blessed person and a kind of angel.



The last examples of the contrasting characteristics of the novel are sin and punishment. Sin can also be interpreted in different ways. The sin committed by the transgressors can have different interpretations; for example, the reader may think Hester's crime was to fall in love with a coward; or that her sin was to have an affair with someone different from her husband, or that she got married to someone she did not love. Punishment can be understood in various ways. For example, Arthur had to be punished because he was as guilty as Hester because he had an affair with a married woman; or he had to be castigated because he lied to the church, broke the rules, and disobeyed God.

Other interesting elements of the novel are the different beliefs, rules, and morals of Puritans. The religion prohibited the reverends or magistrates to wear tunics or ornaments such as those of the Catholic Church officials. Puritans did not like the idea of adoring images or statues; and they interpreted the Bible rigidly. Puritans also did not drink alcohol, dance, or listen to music; according to them those were evil actions inspired by Satan.

They followed the law of the Bible word for word, and nobody could disobey it; that is why they created harsh rules to penalize people who broke the law. They wanted to avoid all the drama they had gone through in England; and in the search for perfection and obedience to the word of the Bible, they became fanatic people who darkened all the great things the New World offered them. Perhaps the dream world they wanted turned into a nightmare for some of them.



On the contrary, Nathaniel Hawthorne does not agree with Puritan behavior. In the novel, he criticizes in different forms the way Puritans acted. His main criticism is of men who undervalued women.

In the last chapter of the work, the perspective Puritan man had about women is clear. Puritan men saw women as only housekeepers who did not have the right to give any opinion about anything. Hester is an example; she was penalized because of her sin, and she demonstrated she could be a better person than before. She changed a lot during the novel; at first, she was a weak and beautiful woman, but at the end, she was stronger, although she did not look as she did before. Moreover, the author of the novel gives his own opinion about women. Through Hester he expresses that women can contribute to society and deal with any problem that arises. He sees women as people who can be as important and intelligent as men. He uses Hester to show the world his perception of how women would be years in the future; in the beginning women were considered as nothing more than individuals without importance who just had children and cleaned the house. In Hawthorne's time, who would say he would be right some day?

Sex and love were taboo issues during Puritan times. The first was not freely allowed and was punished if someone practiced it outside of marriage. However, nowadays these conceptions have changed so much that sex is practiced without any remorse. Some exceptions still exist in some countries like India, Pakistan, etc. Couples get married because their families arrange the weddings.



Sex is still punished as well; in some countries if a woman cheats on her husband, she can be whipped or killed by the community.

Finally, The Scarlet Letter is a novel which deals with different issues such as sex, love, religion, politics, and future patterns that the author thought would become reality in the future. It has some elements which give the story realism and tell the reader a part of the history of The United States. It is also a very ambiguous novel because of the wide range of possible interpretations of every detail in it; the story catches the attention of every one due to its great characters, plot, and setting.



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