

# Nathaniel Hawthorne



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BUSTER**

Nathaniel Hawthorne was a novelist and a short story writer from America. Most of Nathaniel's stories centered on New England, the most common themes in his stories being those of dark romanticism. The themes of inherent evil and the human sins were common in the stories of the novelist. The main aim of his stories was to offer moral lessons and the stories had a feature of deep psychological complexity. In his stories, he suggests that sin, evil, and guilt are natural qualities of human beings and are inseparable from them. The inspiration of these stories comes from the puritan culture in New England at that time. Hawthorne often combined romance, symbolism, and psychological themes to add on his effect. One such work is the "Scarlet Letter" of 1850. The book presents legalism, guilt, and sin as its major themes (Crews, 1966). The aim of this paper is to evaluate Nathaniel Hawthorne critically together with his works to help broaden and deepen the understanding of his works. The following essay will look into depth the book of Hawthorne "Scarlet letter" to analyze Hawthorne's works and the major themes.

Throughout the book, sin and guilt are presented as inseparable characteristics of human beings. The story is about how an adulterous woman conceives a child but lives with the guilt. The woman struggles to regain her dignity by trying to live a repentance life. The main story line itself is about dark romanticism which Hawthorne uses to show the inherent nature of sin and guilt of humankind (Crews, 1966). The woman in the story sins by being adulterous but lives with the guilt all her life. Hawthorne aims to teach that whenever a person sins, he or she will live with the guilt the rest of life. Although one may just sin once, the consequences of the sin will

live until death. Just like the case of the woman in the story, whenever she sees the child she bore during the adulterous encounter, she remembers about her sin. For that reason, she struggles to regain the lost dignity by trying repentance. The guilt haunts the woman all through the book.

Hawthorne tries to teach that a sin will lead to punishment that will haunt someone throughout his or her life. In the story, the adulterous woman has a piece of cloth with the letter "A", which was a symbol of adultery in the puritan community. People lead the woman while she holds her newborn baby in her arms throughout the town for people to see her. As they walk around the town, the woman has the symbol of shame and everyone knows that she is adulterous bringing a lot of shame to her leading to her loss of dignity. Hawthorne presents this in way that he supports it to teach that punishment should follow sinners. The woman had an affair with another man while her husband was away in the sea bearing that man a daughter. The elderly subject the woman to further punishment by haranguing her to reveal the father of the child but she does not reveal. Further punishment befalls the woman as her daughter grows to be mischievous, the community despises them, and the community tries to separate her with the daughter (Hawthorne, 1994).

The man that the woman cheats on is an inspiring minister of the church. The sin of the minister makes him sympathetic to the others as he suffers a lot. The guilt the minister has over the sin causes him major psychological anguish. The minister tries to convince himself that he has saved many souls and that God may have mercy on him because of that. The minister even invents punishments for himself (Hawthorne, 1994).

Hawthorne also presents the legalism as an inseparable nature of humankind. In the story, although the adulterous woman spends most of her time trying to help the poor and the sick, the community rejects her. The woman and her daughter spent their time in solitude. The woman would not even attend church services because of the rejection they received. The community, which was puritan, believed that the sin of adultery condemns those who commit it. For that reason, they shun the woman and the daughter as the community believes that the woman will go to hell. However, the woman thinks that her repentance and that of the minister has washed away their sins (Hawthorne, 1994).

### Conclusion

Hawthorne tries to explore the humankind nature of sin, guilt, and legalism. Throughout the book, the theme of sin and guilt is evident. Guilt will always follow a sin. Hawthorne also shows the strict legalism that the puritan community followed. Although the woman tried her best to repent and help the sick and the poor, the community did forgive her but shunned her away.