

# [In adam in the garden of eden](https://assignbuster.com/in-adam-in-the-garden-of-eden/)

In this essay I am going to discuss the notion ofthe fallen woman which appears in both Hawthorne’s and Faulkner’s works. Ichose these two particular novels because their interpretation of this notionsomewhat diverge from the traditional 19th Victorian understandingof the fallen woman.

A fallen woman is awoman who has lost her good reputation by having sex with someone before she ismarried (Cambridge dictionary, https://dictionary. cambridge. org/dictionary/english/fallen-woman).” The fallen woman was a pervasive figure in the literature and visual arts ofthe Victorian period…

” (https://foundlingmuseum. org. uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/The-Fallen-Woman-exhibition-guide. pdf, pg: 3). The term originated from the Bible. Evetempted Adam in the Garden of Eden which resulted in their fall and exile fromthe Garden.

In this event Eve is portrayed as the temptress and the fact thatshe had fallen is connected to the loss of sexual purity. Victorian women wereinseparably chained to their sexual status. They could either be maidens, meaning wives and mothers, or spinsters and whores (http://www. victorianweb. org/gender/fallen2.

html). Different situations could lead to a woman being labelled as “ fallen”. It doesnot matter whether she was seduced, willingly committed adultery, raped becausein the end she is one left with the stigma and she will be to blame. Sexual relationsout of wedlock were strictly forbidden for women but tolerated for men.  A “ fallen man” concept does not exist (https://foundlingmuseum. org. uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/The-Fallen-Woman-exhibition-guide.

pdf, pg: 9). Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel The Scarlet Letter waspublished in 1850. The plot is set in 1642, in the Puritan settlements of MassachusettsBay Colony.

The Puritan society is extremely religious and pious. For thePuritans the Holy Bible is the law, the guidance for life, social behaviour andpunishment. At the beginning of the novel Hester is seen leaving the prisonwearing an embroidered scarlet letter “ A” on her chest for adultery, in herarms she is holding a baby, a child born out of marriage to a man whoseidentity Hester refuses to reveal. People have gathered to see Hester and mostof them are not satisfied with the punitive measure she was given.

It isprimarily the women that are not satisfied. They expected hanging or at leasthaving them brand her the letter “ A” on the forehead which they perceived asthe mildest form of punishment. Itwas only after Hester experienced and endured the aftereffect of wearing thescarlet letter that she started gaining sympathies from the society. She admitsthat the very letter is the main reason her wanting to become a better versionof herself.

People started to see her as a person you can trust, with genuineintentions. She regained the people’s trust by being honest about who she is. This is shown when she speaks to the magistrates after she hears they labelledher unfit of being a mother to Pearl in chapter eight ” The Elf Child and theMinister”. By Puritan law, a child born out of wedlock is not a child of Godand therefore is not under a divine order. Hester fends for herself by stating that wearing the scarlet letter made her abetter person. Through the letter she learned a lot about the true nature ofhumankind and the evil that is deeply rooted in humanity.

She says that thatbadge has taught her lessons that although can do no good to her but will makeher child wiser and better one day. Societycondemns Hester for her actions but she refuses to be marginalized by them. Shebecomes a helping member of the community and “ repents” by sewing and tendingthose who are in need. These actions result in her being perceived not as” Hester the Adulteress” but as “ Hester the Able” or “ Hester the Angel”. Eventhough her outer appearance has changed, her beauty faded, the most importantchange is the one in her mind, that she became strong and independent. She feltthe law of society could do no harm to her anymore and she found freedom inisolation.             In William Faulkner’s novel we getto see the downfall of a once prosperous family from the American South, theCompsons. Candice “ Caddy” Compson, the daughter of the family lost hervirginity with Dalton Ames, who is also most likely the father of her daughterMiss Quentin, before marriage and with this act damaged the family name.

Theloss of her virtue is the central reason of the ruination of the family’shonour, because her virginity represents the family’s honour in a way. Heractions result in her being abandoned from her family. Most members of thefamily have harsh and upset reactions towards Caddy. Her brother Quentinpossesses obsessive feeling towards her chastity that he tries to lie about himand Caddy committing incest. His obsession leads him into suicide eventually. Thenegative changes that are introduced into the family home are felt by her otherbrother Benjy as well.

He is mentally challenged and cares deeply for Caddy. Heunderstands something is wrong even though he does not understand the conceptof virginity and what Caddy’s losing of it meant. The third brother Jason ismad at Caddy because he lost a job opportunity because of her. His sister’spromiscuity does not bother him. He never really cared about anyone in thefamily but himself. Themother, Caroline Compson, is a hypochondriac who cares only for the family’shonour and name. Her reaction towards Caddy’s act is perhaps the most radicalone.

She perceives Caddy’s sexual maturing as if she had died. After MissQuentin was born, the mother forbids anyone to mention Caddy’s name in front ofMiss Quentin. The family had to practically abandoned Caddy because ofCaroline’s opinion and behaviour. Onlyher father, Jason Compson, reacted differently. He thinks of the concept ofvirginity to be invented by men to control women. It is a social construct andtherefore is unimportant to one’s life and of little to no value. He alsomentions how men lie about being a virgin because they feel ashamed and womenare scrutinized if they lose their chastity out of wedlock and how these doublestandards lead to estrangement between men and women.

Unfortunately, Jason’sprogressive thoughts about this issue made no difference to Caddy’s treatmentin the family. Caddyadmits to never having loved the men she had sex with. She was just looking foran escape from the reality she was born into. After her failed marriage toHerbert Head, which lasted one year, she went to California where she marriedanother man for five years. During WWII she disappeared in Paris and was lastseen in a magazine in a sports car with a German general.             The traditional fate of theVictorian fallen woman is almost without exception tragic.

She would eithercommit suicide, died in an accident, was killed or was executed by theauthorities by hanging. These two female characters differ from the normbecause they did not let society or their own family dictate their lives andopportunities. Instead they took charge of their lives and overcame theirtroubles each in their own way. Candice Compson in 20th centuryAmerican South and Hester Prynne in 17th century PuritanMassachusetts had both showed that with enough willpower and the right mind-setan individual can survive castigation and alienation from society and find hisown spot under the sun.