

In adam in the garden of eden



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

A fallen woman is a woman who has lost her good reputation by having sex with someone before she is married (Cambridge dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fallen-woman>).” The fallen woman was a pervasive figure in the literature and visual arts of the 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. Eve tempted Adam in the Garden of Eden which resulted in their fall and exile from the Garden.

In this event Eve is portrayed as the temptress and the fact that she had fallen is connected to the loss of sexual purity. Victorian women were inseparably 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 does not matter whether she was seduced, willingly committed adultery, raped because in the end she is one left with the stigma and she will be to blame. Sexual relations out 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>).

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pdf, pg: 9). Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* was published in 1850. The plot is set in 1642, in the Puritan settlements of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The Puritan society is extremely religious and pious. For the Puritans the Holy Bible is the law, the guidance for life, social behaviour and punishment. At the beginning of the novel Hester is seen leaving the prison wearing an embroidered scarlet letter "A" on her chest for adultery, in her arms she is holding a baby, a child born out of marriage to a man whose identity Hester refuses to reveal. People have gathered to see Hester and most of them are not satisfied with the punitive measure she was given.

It is primarily the women that are not satisfied. They expected hanging or at least having them brand her the letter "A" on the forehead which they perceived as the mildest form of punishment. It was only after Hester experienced and endured the aftereffect of wearing the scarlet letter that she started gaining sympathies from the society. She admits that the very letter is the main reason her wanting to become a better version of herself.

People started to see her as a person you can trust, with genuine intentions. 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 labelled her unfit of being a mother to Pearl in chapter eight "The Elf Child and the Minister". By Puritan law, a child born out of wedlock is not a child of God and therefore is not under a divine order. Hester fends for herself by stating that wearing the scarlet letter made her a better person. Through the

letter she learned a lot about the true nature of humankind and the evil that is deeply rooted in humanity.

She says that that badge has taught her lessons that although can do no good to her but will make her child wiser and better one day.

Society condemns Hester for her actions but she refuses to be marginalized by them. She becomes a helping member of the community and “repents” by sewing and tending those 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”. Even though her outer appearance has changed, her beauty faded, the most important change is the one in her mind, that she became strong and independent. She felt the law of society could do no harm to her anymore and she found freedom in isolation.

In William Faulkner's novel we get to see the downfall of a once prosperous family from the American South, the Compsons. Candice “Caddy” Compson, the daughter of the family lost her virginity with Dalton Ames, who is also most likely the father of her daughter Miss Quentin, before marriage and with this act damaged the family name.

The loss of her virtue is the central reason of the ruination of the family's honour, because her virginity represents the family's honour in a way. Her actions result in her being abandoned from her family. Most members of the family have harsh and upset reactions towards Caddy. Her brother Quentin possesses obsessive feelings towards her chastity that he tries to lie about and Caddy committing incest. His obsession leads him into suicide eventually. The negative changes that are introduced into the family home are felt by her other brother Benjy as well.

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He is mentally challenged and cares deeply for Caddy. He understands something is wrong even though he does not understand the concept of virginity and what Caddy's losing of it meant. The third brother Jason is mad at Caddy because he lost a job opportunity because of her. His sister's promiscuity does not bother him. He never really cared about anyone in the family but himself. The mother, Caroline Compson, is a hypochondriac who cares only for the family's honour and name. Her reaction towards Caddy's act is perhaps the most radical one.

She perceives Caddy's sexual maturing as if she had died. After Miss Quentin was born, the mother forbids anyone to mention Caddy's name in front of Miss Quentin. The family had to practically abandon Caddy because of Caroline's opinion and behaviour. Only her father, Jason Compson, reacted differently. He thinks of the concept of virginity to be invented by men to control women. It is a social construct and therefore is unimportant to one's life and of little to no value. He also mentions how men lie about being a virgin because they feel ashamed and women are scrutinized if they lose their chastity out of wedlock and how these double standards lead to estrangement between men and women.

Unfortunately, Jason's progressive thoughts about this issue made no difference to Caddy's treatment in the family. Caddy admits to never having loved the men she had sex with. She was just looking for an escape from the reality she was born into. After her failed marriage to Herbert Head, which lasted one year, she went to California where she married another man for five years. During WWII she disappeared in Paris and was last seen in a

magazine in a sports car with a German general. The traditional fate of the Victorian fallen woman is almost without exception tragic.

She would either commit suicide, died in an accident, was killed or was executed by the authorities by hanging. These two female characters differ from the norm because they did not let society or their own family dictate their lives and opportunities. Instead they took charge of their lives and overcame their troubles each in their own way. Candice Compson in 20th century American South and Hester Prynne in 17th century Puritan Massachusetts had both showed that with enough willpower and the right mind-set an individual can survive castigation and alienation from society and find his own spot under the sun.