

Short description: misconceptions about puritanism

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The *Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne is a romance novel, depicting the harsh truth that Puritanism was a faulty and overall, ineffective system. Hester Prynne, an adulterous woman, is seen as the inferiority of the town because of her sin, despite the fact that many of her scorers are sinners as well. People of her civilization were cruel and deceitful. To follow in the footsteps of God, they sought pure lives and strict living conditions. However, instead of living rustically and modestly they revelled in the forbidden fruits of their world. In this text, Hawthorne conveys the central idea of hypocrisy and unconfessed sin only leading you backwards by using irony and two-faced characters better known as hypocrites. Hypocrisy is represented in the text and the Puritan society by Governor Bellingham, the townspeople and Hester's illicit paramour himself, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. Puritans considered themselves to be God's 'chosen ones' and lived simplistic lives. They weren't supposed to indulge in expensive or fruitful items.

Governor Bellingham, however, is a hypocrite himself, dressing luxuriously while enforcing Puritan plainness on the people he governs. Bellingham strolls about the town, flaunting his wealth by wearing " a dark feather in his hat, a border of embroidery on his cloak, and a black velvet tunic beneath. Contrary to the Puritan belief system, the head of the Puritan society is all decked out with what is considered to be forbidden luxuries. His actions of partaking in immoral and illegal pleasure provides a physical metaphor for hypocrisy. The townspeople and pursuers of Puritanism are no saints compared to their governor. In fact, they might even be worse at following the guidelines of their society. Their warped method of apologizing to God

for one of their own sinning is to publicly shame and humiliate them. Even worse, the mothers taught their children to act in a displeasing manner towards Hester because she was an adulterer. In reality, if the truth rang free in this small Massachusetts town, “ a scarlet letter would blaze forth on many a bosom besides Hester Prynne’s. The townspeople had the nerve to publicly mock and shame Hester for committing a sin when many of them committed have sins themselves. Far more unacceptable, they commit their sins in privacy while still pretending to be a pious Puritan.

Clergyman and Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale gives both Governor Bellingham and the townspeople a run for their money in the hypocrisy department. After Hester’s appearance on the scaffold with his sin born child, he continues preaching about what it means to be a dedicated Puritan. As the town’s minister, he is immeasurably adored by the townspeople in their eyes he could do no wrong. Why would he risk losing the limelight to openly become a sinner? Even if Dimmesdale came clean about his adventures with crime and hypocrisy, would his dedicated followers “ start up in their seats, by a simultaneous impulse, and tear him down out of the pulpit which he defiled? Not so, indeed! They heard it all, and did but reverence him the more.

The people’s love for him is so strong, he can’t shake it; not with neglect, not with contradiction, not even with sin. He excuses himself from responsibility by saying it would only be “ to add hypocrisy to sin. I mean, there is no reason to lose his esteemed position in the community if in Dimmesdale’s eyes, what he did wasn’t even a sin, right? Wrong, he not only abandoned

Hester in her time of need, but his own child as well not to mention he was the cause of his own health decline. Overall, Dimmesdale was the biggest hypocrite in the Puritan community. All of these characters demonstrate direct examples of hypocrisy in the text and their own society: Governor Bellingham with his extravagances, the townspeople with their hidden sins, and Dimmesdale secret scandal. The Puritans were narrow minded, cruel people and at best, they were genuine hypocrites. The actions, chattels and possessions they desired were verboten, but that did not stop these so called holier-than-thou, self righteous people. Not even the love for God could steer these people and their way of life in a more humane direction.