

# Hawthorne's tone in the scarlet letter



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Hawthorne's tone towards the Puritans is critical while his tone towards Hester is admiring. His criticism is apparent when he points out the Puritan's hypocrisy, as well as when he shows respect for people and ideas that seem oppositional to Puritan beliefs. Hawthorne's admiration for Hester becomes clear both when he describes her physical beauty, and her independence. The Puritans are, at times, extremely hypocritical. They strive to create a Utopia in which all of their perfect citizens will live. As one of their leaders described it, a "city upon a hill".

Hawthorne points out that despite their goal of reaching a Utopia, the Puritans definitely expect crime in their city, "The founders of a new colony, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site for a prison." Although the Puritans claim that their town is perfect, they must not truly believe this if a prison is one of the first things they build. Another example of their hypocrisy that Hawthorne shows is while Hester is being judged on the scaffold: "before society had grown corrupt enough to smile, instead of shuddering at it. Puritans claim to be prime examples of people who attempt to devoid themselves of all sin, yet judge this woman from their community and use this judgment to punish her even! They are clearly not the near-saints they claim to be since they are so judgmental. Hawthorne uses another, more direct technique to illustrate his disapproval of the Puritans. His description of the Puritan woman who speaks of Hester as she exits the prison shows his criticism, as well as his respect for Anne Hutchinson.

Hawthorne sounds very condescending while talking about the Puritan women outside the jail, " There was, moreover, a boldness and rotundity of speech among these matrons, as most of them seemed to be, that would startle us at the present day, whether in respect to its purport or volume of tone. " Using diction such as boldness and rotundity to describe their speech, Hawthorne seems to incriminate or antagonize these women who come off as rude. Besides characters, this is the only time we read specifically about regular Puritan townspeople, and with Hawthorne's explanation they are not impressive.

The author states his disagreement with the Puritan religion as a whole when he writes, " or whether, it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Anne Hutchinson". Someone who refers to Hutchinson as sainted must dislike Puritans, because she certainly had her conflicts with them. Hawthorne admires Hester because she is physically beautiful and because she is independent and opposes her Puritan community. The first physical explanation of any kind of Hester Prynne's appearance is very impressive: " The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and a face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. " Hawthorne clearly creates Hester to be an attractive young lady whose beauty he admires himself. The greatest reason that Hawthorne holds Hester in such high esteem however is her self-reliance and rebellion. At her heart, Hester is a true Puritan rebel, " Yet, had

little Pearl not come to her from the spiritual world, it might have been far otherwise.

Then, she might have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Anne Hutchinson, as the foundress of a religious sect. She might, in one of her phases, been a prophetess. She might, and not improbably would, have suffered death from the stern tribunals of the period, for trying to undermine the foundations of the Puritan establishment. " Clearly, if not for the welfare of her child, Hester Prynne would have been very oppositional to her Puritan neighbors. We know that Hawthorne admires this because of his disrespect for Puritans. For these reasons, Hawthorne's tone towards Hester is admiring.