

Sin, Guilt, and the Mind of Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Nathaniel Hawthorne's works are notable for their treatment of guilt and the complexities of moral choices. "Moral and religious concerns, in short, are almost always present in Hawthorne's work"(Foster, 56). Given Hawthorne's background, it is not a stretch of the imagination to say that his novels are critiques of Puritanism. [Hawthorne](#) lived in the deeply scarred New England area, separated from Puritanism by only one generation. His grandfather had been one of the judges in the Salem Witch Trials. Personal issues include the various ways Hawthorne's family and specific events in his life influenced his writing. Readers can easily recognize how "Young Goodman Brown" incorporates facts about his Puritan [ancestors](#). Father Hooper in "The Minister's Black Veil" may be symbolically paralleled to Hawthorne's ancestors, trying to hide a sin they have committed. His descendants' remarks on him in The Custom House introduction to The Scarlet Letter mix pride in Hawthorne's prominence and a sense of inherited [guilt](#) for his deeds as judge. Hawthorne's guilt of wrongs committed by his ancestors was paramount in the development of his literary career. He investigates human weaknesses through the time period of his ancestors. Generally Hawthorne's writings contained powerful symbolic and psychological effects of pride, guilt, sin and punishment.

The theme of pride may be recognized as a vice or as a virtue in Hawthorne's works, depending on the situation. Goodman Brown from "Young Goodman Brown" becomes a victim of his own pride and he consequently suffers. Goodman Brown has a feeling of superiority over the rest of the village. He attains his feeling after he sees all the pe...

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... lead to deterioration of the body, as experienced by Arthur Dimmesdale and the consequences of hiding sin, like Arthur Dimmesdale, and of publicly acknowledging it, like Hester Prynne. Hawthorne inherited the Puritan tradition of moral earnestness, and he was deeply concerned with the concepts of original sin and guilt.

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