

# Portrayal of Puritan Society in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter

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In the introductory sketch to Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel "The Scarlet Letter", the reader is informed that one of the author's ancestors persecuted the Quakers harshly. The latter's son was a high judge in the Salem witch trials, put into literary form in Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" (Judge Hathorne appears there). We learn that [Hawthorne](#) feels ashamed for their [deeds](#), and that he sees his ancestors and the Puritan society as a whole with critical eyes. Consequently, both open and subtle

criticism of the Puritans' practices is applied throughout the novel.

Hawthorne's comments have to be regarded in the context of the settlers' history and religion. They believe that man is a creature steeped in sin, ever since Adam and Eve's fall from innocence. To them, committing the original sin strapped human beings of their own free will, so that God now decides about their lives. Everything that happens is seen as God's will, and providence plays an important role.

Through the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ, however, there is a chance for people to be saved. One cannot definitely know who will be saved, although pious and faithful people are of course more likely to. The experience of conversion, in which the soul is touched by the Holy Spirit, so that the believer's heart is turned from sinfulness to holiness, is another indication that one is of the elect. Faithfulness and piety, rather than good deeds are what saves people. If someone has [sinned](#), public confession is believed to take some of the burden of this sin off him.

The initial reason for the Puritans to leave their homes was the treatment they had to suffer from in their native England. They were brutally persecuted and were not allowed to practise their religion, because they said that the beliefs taught by the Anglican church were against the Bible. When they arrived in the New World, they were confronted with numerous threats from the outside. Their trying to take land away from the Indians caused many fights and attacks. Moreover, they had to deal with the total wilderness surrounding them. Under these frontier conditions, they needed

harmony and peace inside the community in order to survive.

As a result, Hawthorne's founding fathers immediately saw the necessity to

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