



FACULDADE DE FILOLOXÍA

The Puritan Heritage in the Fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne

María Judith Díaz Méndez

Titor: Constante González Groba

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

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Autora

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith', is positioned below the word 'Autora'. The signature is stylized and somewhat abstract.

Asdo. María Judith Díaz Méndez

CUBRIR ESTE FORMULARIO ELECTRONICAMENTE

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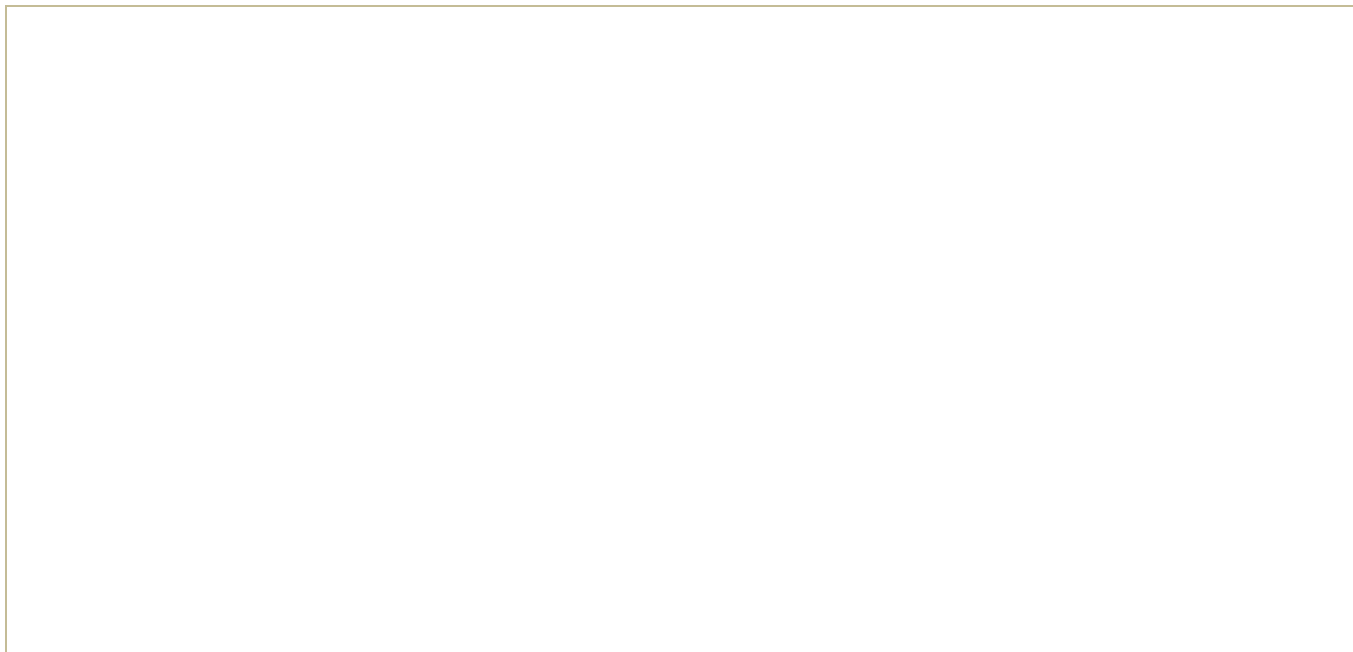
Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redacta-lo TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

This study is focused on the Heritage of Puritanism in the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne, making emphasis on the impact of sin, also related to evil and guilt, in Hawthorne's characters and plots. Nathaniel Hawthorne was very interested in expressing these Puritan principles and ideas in his works because he aimed to provide his public with a very critical evaluation of Puritanism. Even though in some aspects, Nathaniel Hawthorne rejected the Puritan beliefs, he was remarkably influenced by them.

The corpus used for this project is based on novels and short stories related to the Puritan ideology in which Nathaniel Hawthorne was born and raised. Among the different works used to make a rigorous study on this topic are a few tales and narratives, all of them written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Some of these texts that constitute the basis of this project are "The Minister's Black Veil", "Young Goodman Brown", *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, among others.

The main aim of this study is to examine the close relationship that exists between Hawthorne's fiction and the Puritan religion, as well as the reflections of the big impact of Puritan beliefs on every one of Hawthorne's stories and novels.

The method used to analyze the impact of Puritanism in Hawthorne's work is based on the precise study of different literary works from Hawthorne, comparing how Puritan ideals are differently portrayed in Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction.



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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
1. Puritanism and its relevance in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s career.....	4
1.1 The Birth of Puritanism	4
1.2 The arrival of Puritanism in America	6
2 Nathaniel Hawthorne and Puritanism	8
2.1 The relevance of “The Custom – House”	11
3 The notions of evil, sin and guilt in <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> and <i>The House of the Seven Gables</i>	14
3.1 <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (1850).....	16
3.2 <i>The House of The Seven Gables</i> (1851).....	22
4 The notions of evil, sin and guilt in “The Minister’s Black Veil” and “Young Goodman Brown”.....	29
4.1 “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836)	29
4.2 “Young Goodman Brown” (1835).....	34
Conclusion.....	39
Works Cited.....	43

Introduction

The birth of the Puritan religion in the late 16th century had a great impact on society and literature. The rise of a new nation in America meant the origin of a new culture and ideology that contributed to the enrichment of American literature. The Puritan religion was a strict regime defined by showing great devotion to God and characterized by its sternness towards those who disrespected its doctrine. The importance of the Puritan movement was such that it left an indelible impression on society. The lifestyle of the Puritan people and the controversies regarding the witch hysteria or the persecution of Quakers, among others, worked as a source of inspiration for many literary authors. Nathaniel Hawthorne is the best example of how Puritanism affected American history and literature. It is impossible to analyze Nathaniel Hawthorne's works properly without taking into consideration his Puritan heritage. The Puritan religion brought the author huge torment and a lifetime full of guilt, but bad things always have a bright side. The author's heinous family ancestry helped him to become one of the most relevant authors of American literature.

This study is concerned with the bond that existed between the Puritan religion and the Salem-born author Nathaniel Hawthorne. The following novels and tales presented in this research are only a few examples of the influence of Puritanism on the personality and literary style of Nathaniel Hawthorne. *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, "The Minister's Black Veil" and "Young Goodman Brown" may seem similar at first sight since all of them share some common background, but in each of them Hawthorne depicts his preoccupations and concerns in different ways providing the readers with different stories to entertain themselves, but also intending to illustrate the public with the basis of the society that surrounds them.

The main aim of this study is not only to spot the traces of Puritanism in each of the aforementioned works and how they affected the author's career but also highlight the differences and similarities that we can find inside Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction. This thorough research is also concerned with providing an insight into Nathaniel Hawthorne's mind to better understand his works and style.

This project is divided into four chapters. The first one is focused on the historical context of the Puritan religion and the second one is devoted to providing a background of Nathaniel Hawthorne's life and how Puritanism affected him. The third chapter of this study is focused on the explicit and rigorous analysis of two of Hawthorne's most famous novels, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* and finally, the fourth and last chapter is devoted to analyzing two of Hawthorne's tales, "The Minister's Black Veil" and "Young Goodman Brown". The novels chosen for the third chapter are good examples of how sin, guilt and the burden of the past play a crucial role in Hawthorne's fiction. *The Scarlet Letter* could be considered to be a more autobiographical novel since it includes an introductory chapter titled "The Custom-House" in which a more personal part of the author can be seen. The other selected narrative, *The House of the Seven Gables*, is considered as Hawthorne's best novel by many critics. It differs from *The Scarlet Letter* because it addresses more directly Hawthorne's guilty conscience regarding his ancestors. It is also interesting and appropriate to include "The Minister's Black Veil" in this study since its structure and plot are somehow similar to those of *The Scarlet Letter*. In the two selected short stories dealt with in the third chapter, Nathaniel Hawthorne works on the idea of mankind's evil and sinfulness. The last tale discussed, "Young Goodman Brown", is one of Hawthorne's most famous short stories. Many critics and even the public find this story very interesting and special in comparison to other Hawthorne's works due to the excellent play of ambiguity with which the author works.

More than a tale, “Young Goodman Brown” is considered to be an allegory “embodying Hawthorne’s suspicions about man’s depravity” (Hurley 410).

1. Puritanism and its relevance in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s career

1.1 The Birth of Puritanism

Puritanism originated in the late 16th with the aim of ‘purifying’ the Anglican Church from Roman Catholicism. Puritans and Catholics did not only differ in God’s way of ruling the earth but also disagreed on other trivial things related to religious practices like, for instance, the use of wedding rings in marriage ceremonies or what type of vestments to use in church services. However, Puritanism did not only emerge as a consequence of the rejection of Catholic practices, but it was also influenced by a branch of Protestantism known as Calvinism that originated at the hands of John Calvin and his followers in the 16th century. Because of being born from this doctrine, Puritanism shared many tenets with Calvinism. Besides agreeing in the rejection of Catholic practices in England and the desire to distance themselves from them, predestination was another important basis to these two religious movements. The idea of predestination establishes that no matter the number of good deeds people had done in their lifetime in order to be always protected by God and be sure to get to paradise after death, entering the gates of Heaven depends exclusively on God’s will. This occurs because, according to Calvinists, even before birth, God has already decided who are the people who will make their way to salvation and who will not (Wallace 201).

All Puritans agreed in the rejection of Catholicism, but this does not mean that there were not different ideas and opinions inside the community. Thus, two different groups appeared inside the same doctrine: The Separatists and Non-separatists, also popularly known as Pilgrims and Puritans. The Separatists, or Independents, desired to separate from the Church of England, while the second ones only wanted to reform it. As

Leonard J. Trinterud mentions in “The Origins of Puritanism” that this group was “very rigidly orthodox” (49). Trinterud also explains:

[Separatists] wished at first no more than the right to exist within the Church of England as conscientious non-conformists until such time as the Church might have become more fully reformed. (50)

The Puritan movement already started during the reign of King Henry VIII and it continued throughout the rule of some of his successors. The split between the Catholic church and the King of England occurred because Henry VIII demanded a divorce from his wife, Anne Boleyn, but the Pope refused to allow it. This event caused the fury of the King and in order to get away with the divorce, he created a new church which only differed from the Roman Catholic Church in one thing: the head of the institution. In Henry VIII’s new church the power rested with the Crown, while in the Catholic church, the greatest exponent of power was, and still is, the Pope.

King Henry VIII was succeeded first by his son Edward, then by his daughter Mary and lastly by his other daughter, Elizabeth. During her reign, Queen Mary I tried to abrogate his father’s church, but when Elizabeth I became Queen, she decided to restore the church founded by his father but introducing some changes. Queen Elizabeth I allowed some Catholic practices during her regime in spite of being a Protestant queen. This decision was not welcomed by the public and it led to conflict between the Crown and those who rejected the Catholic Church. This tension between the so-called Puritans (name given by their enemies) and the English Crown increased during the following years. Queen Elizabeth was known as the Virgin Queen because she did not have descendants and thus, she was succeeded by James VI of Scotland and I of England, a distant relative. James’ rise to the English throne brought the end of a dynasty and the beginning of the Jacobean Era, but the start of a new period only brought negative

consequences to the Puritan community. The English Crown did not allow Puritan Separatists to create their own church in England and those who did not obey were severely punished. The religious tension was eased in the beginning of the 17th century, when a great number of Puritans decided to leave England to travel to America or, as they used to call it, the New World. The Puritans saw this new and unknown land as the perfect place to start over, where they could freely practice their religion and live under the Puritan rules that they had designed.

1.2 The arrival of Puritanism in America

“Great Migrations” is the name given to the massive movements of Puritans from England to America. These migrations occurred in two waves, the first one in the 1620s and the second one, ten years later, in the 1630s. When the English Puritans arrived in America, they established different settlements and started to build a community with its own economic, social and religious system. The Puritan community founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony and led by John Winthrop, they established their home in a land that they named New England. Winthrop was a renowned minister among the Puritans, and he introduced to his people his idea of creating a new perfect and ideal society under the dogma of the ‘City Upon a Hill’, motto that best exemplified the Puritan doctrine. The first time Winthrop mentioned this idea was in a sermon that he delivered before the first departure to America when he said to his people: “we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us”, meaning that God was always watching people and observing who was a sinner and who was not. Winthrop and the whole community of Puritan people wanted to create a new model of society different from the one they were coming from. Even though the idea of starting over very far away from England sounded really promising for the first Puritans in America, the truth is that the

community still had to deal with some controversies like the problems with Quakerism (a religious current of Puritanism founded during the 17th century) and witchcraft.

As it occurred with the Puritans, the Quakers were a group of people who created their own religious doctrine due to the dissatisfaction with the Church of England. This disagreement caused persecutions and severe punishments from the English Crown and Church and thus, Quakers were forced into exile. Those Quakers who chose the New World as their refuge suffered once again persecutions and tortures but this time at the hands of the Puritans, who considered them “heretics”.

As for witchcraft, the practice of witch-hunting was originated in Europe in the 14th century. In America, persecution of witches became very popular in the recently settled Puritan communities that came from Britain. For New England, the end of the 17th century was characterized by the Salem Witch Trials which involved a series of persecutions and hearings that took place especially in Salem, Massachusetts, from February 1692 to May 1693. The beginning of this witch ‘hysteria’ in the colony was triggered by the arrest of some family members of a Puritan minister named Samuel Parrish that lived in Salem Village and, from that moment onwards, multiple detentions of people suspicious of practicing black magic took place in the aforementioned place. Many people, especially women, were accused of meeting with the devil or practicing his magic and thus, as punishment for their sins, they were tortured or sentenced to death by being burned alive at the stake. The witch-hunting’s hysteria expanded to different places of the world until it gradually lost strength and ended up disappearing in the 18th century.

Moreover, the early 1700s marked the beginning of the Puritan decline. The birth of Enlightenment in Europe caused a religious revival known as the First Great Awakening, which took place in the English colonies in America in the 1730s. This social

and religious movement was born with the aim to reform the existent churches in the English colonies in America and unify them. Therefore many religious groups, like the Quakers, the Anglicans, and especially the Puritans, that back in the time were established in the English colonies, were affected and even weakened by the Great Awakening. The changes that took place during the 18th century caused New England to evolve from “a state of homogeneous Puritanism to heterogeneous ‘colonialism’” (Rossel 919) and the Puritan faith stopped being the primary doctrine in the colonies. Ultimately, Puritanism weakened and progressively died out but, in spite of this, Puritanism was a powerful doctrine that managed to make its ethic last in America during the following centuries and it helped to create the principles of the American nation.

2 Nathaniel Hawthorne and Puritanism

Nathaniel Hawthorne is most known for writing novels and stories that reflect his strong connection with his birthplace and the historical events that took place there before his birth. Salem, together with Puritan notions and Hawthorne’s Puritan forefathers played a fundamental role in his career.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1804. He spent in Salem most of his childhood and youth. At first, he lived with his parents and two sisters in their own house in Salem, but after the father’s death, the family decided to move with the Mannings, maternal relatives that also lived in Salem, until they could move again to a new house outside this village. During his lifetime, Hawthorne left his native ground many times, but he always came back for reasons that he himself could not understand nor explain as he affirms in “The Custom-House”, the introductory chapter to one of his most famous novels, *The Scarlet Letter*:

My doom was on me. It was not the first time, nor the second, that I had gone away – as it seemed, permanently, – but yet returned, [...] as if Salem were for me the inevitable centre of the universe. (9)

The first time Hawthorne left Salem was during his stay with the Mannings because his uncle sent him to study in Portland. The second time Hawthorne had to say goodbye to his birthplace occurred when the family moved to the new house that they had built in Raymond, Maine. Hawthorne spent many years in Maine and for that he kept a good memory of it. In 1821, Hawthorne left his home village again to attend Bowdoin College, in Brunswick, but he returned to Salem after he was graduated. Soon after this, he moved to Boston for work. From 1853 to 1860, Nathaniel Hawthorne, together with his wife and children, moved to Europe because he accepted the position of American consul in England. Living abroad changed Nathaniel Hawthorne's perception of England and, surprisingly, leaving Liverpool even caused him a permanent feeling of sorrow which might have lived inside of him until his death. As Nina Baym declares, "When Hawthorne returned to the United States, he felt displaced and alienated [since] he had grown accustomed to life in Europe" (17). The Hawthorne family returned to Salem four years later; however, they did not establish their home there, instead, they chose Concord, another settlement of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, as their home.

As Arlin Turner mentions in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*, Nathaniel Hawthorne did not acknowledge the origin of his ancestry until he graduated from college. Hawthorne became acquainted with his ancestors' significant roles in the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony when he was searching for materials about the history of New England to start his career as an author (59). Finding out about William and John Hathorne was a life changing revelation for him and it also affected his perception about himself and his principles. After doing some research, Hawthorne found out that William Hathorne (1607 – 1681) was the first Hawthorne to come from England

to America and, together with other English Puritans, he settled in Salem. Eventually, William Hathorne became a member of the General Court of Massachusetts and participated in the persecution of Quakers, as Nathaniel Hawthorne himself declares in “The Custom-House”:

He was a soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the Church; he had all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil. He was likewise a bitter persecutor; as witness the Quakers, who have remembered him in their histories. (7)

Nathaniel Hawthorne also came upon with another important figure in the Hawthorne lineage, John Hathorne (1641 – 1717), William’s son, who was most known for taking part as a judge in the Salem Witch Trials. Because of his privileged situation provided by the good social position of his father and due to his interest in politics from a very young age, John Hathorne became a magistrate of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Very committed to religion, Hathorne’s main goal was to fight the devil and evil. Moreover, his devotion to the Puritan faith led him to the beginning of his reputation as a witch persecutor and famous judge in the Salem Witch Trials, as Nathaniel Hawthorne affirms in “The Custom – House”:

[William’s] son, too, inherited the persecuting spirit, and made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches, that their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him. (7)

As if Salem’s controversial historical past was not enough, the fact that these two Puritans figures were Hawthorne’s forefathers was overwhelming for him and, in an attempt to distance himself from his legacy, he slightly changed the spelling of his last name from Hathorne to Hawthorne.

2.1 The relevance of “The Custom – House”

As it was previously stated, “The Custom – House” is the introductory chapter to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne’s first long piece of fiction (Baym xvi) which, according to Nina Baym in *The Scarlet Letter: A Reading*, “occupies a turning point [in Hawthorne’s career]: secure in his creative powers after a long apprenticeship, he turned from the safer, slighter short form to the challenges and rewards of the novel” (xvii).

“The Custom – House” was written with the intention of providing the readers with a background for the novel *The Scarlet Letter*. In this sketch, the author explains to the readers how he discovered a red piece of cloth with the shape of the letter *A*, as well as a manuscript in which the name Hester Prynne is written. The combination of real and fantastic facts presented in this introductory chapter has a very important function because, apart from telling the readers about Hawthorne’s experience working in a custom – house and how he discovered the scarlet letter, the author also mentions some very personal issues that played a crucial role in his literary career, like the aforementioned complex relationship that he shared with both his birthplace and his forefathers. Here, Nathaniel Hawthorne opens himself and sincerely expresses his ambivalent feelings for Salem, about which he comments, “This old town of Salem—my native place, though I have dwelt much away from it both in boyhood and maturer years—possesses, or did possess, a hold on my affection, the force of which I have never realized during my seasons of actual residence here” (6) and he continues,

The sentiment is probably assignable to the deep and aged roots which my family has stuck into the soil. It is now nearly two centuries and a quarter since the original Briton, the earliest emigrant of my name, made his appearance in the wild and forest—bordered settlement which has since become a city. And here his descendants have been born and died. (6)

After many years publishing many literary works behind the anonymity, Nathaniel Hawthorne reveals himself completely to the public in “The Custom – House” by

exposing who he is and where he comes from. It is most likely that it was very difficult for the author to write and include this autobiographical chapter in one of his most famous novels given the fact that he addresses directly some of the issues that were the cause of a great tormenting for him. “The Custom – House” carries great weight in Hawthorne’s literature because it is of great interest knowing the author more personally in order to better understand how he portrayed his creativity in his writings. In this sketch, Hawthorne openly declares that he feels shame for his ancestors, and he cannot leave his past behind, but he finds relief in asking for pardon for everything that the previous Hawthornes had done to the Salem community (7).

The preoccupation for his family’s identity is also reflected in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables* which focuses on a family that has to deal with the sin committed many years before by a forefather. Through the plot of this novel, Hawthorne shows the reader his opinion about his ancestors and the consequences and impact of their actions on the contemporary times in which he lived. Hawthorne’s position with respect to the Puritan movement was very ambivalent since he respected his ancestors, but he did not agree with them, and even though he did not completely follow this creed, Puritanism played an important role not only in his life but also in his literary career. In a sense, his Puritan roots haunted him and thus he despised them and found himself constantly running away from Puritanism, which he believed to be “hard, cold and confined” (Schwartz 195).

According to Agnes Donohue, during his stay in Europe, Hawthorne’s letters “reveal conflict of sensibilities, with a gradual change from hostility toward the English to a feeling that in England he had found his old home. Finally, his confusion made him state repeatedly that he had no desire to return to an America in turmoil or in peace” (12). Hidden feelings inside Hawthorne seemed to arise during his years as a European resident

and the past from which he tried to escape for so many years experienced an unexpected turn to the point that, when the time to leave England arrived, Hawthorne was overwhelmingly devastated because he started to imagine himself and his family living happily in England for the rest of their lives and never coming back to Salem. Before returning permanently to America, Nathaniel Hawthorne stayed in France and Italy, but in this period of time he was still carrying the depressing feelings for leaving England.

Despite the fact that in his last years, Nathaniel Hawthorne seemed to have changed his perception about his forefathers' native land, the truth is that he still despised Puritanism not only as a religion but also as a culture and lifestyle, and he always felt horrified by it. According to Frederick Crews, although "Hawthorne's evocations of Puritan times gave him a guilty identity" (38), Puritanism was present in almost every literary work he wrote during his career. Hawthorne channeled his criticism towards this system in his tales and novels through his characters, his plots and his settings. Yet, Hawthorne not only wrote about the Puritan tenets and society but also about Quakers and witches, small communities that were affected by the Puritan doctrine and were involved in conflicts with Puritan figures like William and John Hathorne. As Joseph Schwartz writes in "Hawthorne's Puritanism", Puritans and Quakers desired to step away from "the domination of the Established Church; yet, the Puritans would not give aid or even tolerance to their brothers in dissent" (207). In addition to this, Schwartz observes: "Hawthorne disapproved of the fanaticism of both sects [Puritanism and Quakers], but he could not tolerate the persecution of any body of people by another group" (207 – 208).

Like the problem of Quakers, the issue of Witchcraft, that took place in Salem during the 17th century, was something which woke inside Hawthorne a feeling of guilt and responsibility and it worked as a source of inspiration for him to write, as it can be seen in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, "Young Goodman Brown" and "The Hollow of

the Three Hills”, among others. In Hawthorne’s opinion, believing in witchcraft was a result of the Puritan fanaticism, as well as “natural fears and superstitions” (Turner 66). In his works, Hawthorne always made clear to his readers that he absolutely distanced himself from any of the beliefs of this doctrine. Nevertheless, for some critics, Hawthorne not only focused his career as an author on writing about Puritanism to denounce the cruelty of the aforementioned religion, but also because the Puritan subject helped him to achieve success, as Barriss Mills points out in “Hawthorne and Puritanism”:

In a rather sweeping generalization [W. C. Brownell] asserted that Hawthorne’s writings were almost invariably successful when they dealt with Puritan themes, almost always a failure when they did not. (78)

Be that as it may, it cannot be denied that the horrors and tragedies that haunted Nathaniel Hawthorne until the time of his death helped him to become one of the best American writers of Dark Romanticism, together with other renowned novelists like Edgar Allan Poe or Herman Melville.

3 The notions of evil, sin and guilt in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*

To fully comprehend Nathaniel Hawthorne’s works, we have to comment not only on his heritage but also on how he perceived the basic tenets of Puritanism and how they are portrayed in his fiction. In plenty of Hawthorne’s writings, readers can spot a tone of denouncing or even mockery about the behaviour and beliefs of the Puritan community. In every novel and tale, the author tends to approach the same issues related to Puritanism but always from a different perspective, giving the public distinct content but with the same clear message: the rejection of Puritan religion. For this reason, many critics have classified the different works written by Nathaniel Hawthorne according to the themes which are discussed in them. Yet, before analyzing some of Hawthorne’s writings, we

have to go deeper into the author's conception of sin because, as Henry G. Fairbanks accurately declares, "sin is not the background in Hawthorne's works. It is the foreground itself" (983).

Nathaniel Hawthorne believed in evil and sin. He considered that everyone could be a sinner in a way or another, but in opposition to the Puritan ideals, Hawthorne also believed in good and free will (Fairbanks 976) and, above all, he acknowledged the existence of repentance and pardon. Hawthorne completely disagreed with the way Puritan religion dealt with sinners. From his perspective, everyone risks of sinning, but not all sins nor sinners are equal, hence his disapproval of the harshness of the Puritan punishments which were commonly imposed on those who dared to disobey God's rigid doctrine. As Fairbanks states, "For if evil was rooted tenaciously in the heart of man, Hawthorne did not regard it as ineradicable. By the inscrutable operation of Divine will, sin was even convertible to good" (979). In addition to this, Nathaniel Hawthorne believed that good and evil were not opposite conceptions but close notions separated by a fine line which at times could be blurred. In "Hawthorne and Melville: The Unpardonable Sin", James E. Miller Jr. comments on this issue saying that "It is not surprising to find Hawthorne dramatizing the greatest evil originating from good in view of his fascination with the converse of the process – that is, the genuine benefits that result from sin" (92). It is in this same study where Miller distinguishes some categories of wrongdoing inside Hawthorne's fiction:

the initiation into sin ("Young Goodman Brown"), the discovery of omnipresence of sin ("Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent"), the tortures of concealed sin ("Roger Marvins Burial"), the beneficial results of sin (*The Marble Faun*). (91)

Other critics, like Margarita Georgieva in "The Burden of Secret Sin: The Fictions of Nathaniel Hawthorne", point out some additional classes like sin as inevitable force

(as it appears in “The Minister’s Black Veil” and “The Birthmark”) and sin connected to sexuality (as it occurs in “The Wedding Knell” and *The Scarlet Letter*). Georgieva also sets out another type of wrongdoing: the inherited sin, as in *The House of the Seven Gables*. However, this is not the unique central issue in Hawthorne’s works. Sin is often instigated by evil and tends to be the cause of great guiltiness for the fictional characters. Therefore, apart from sin, Hawthorne also gives relevant roles to these two issues in his fiction.

3.1 *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)

The Scarlet Letter is one of the most famous works written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and like many others of his writings, the environment in which the plot takes place is a secluded and very pious Puritan village. Moreover, the action of the story focuses on how the Puritan religion affects the characters’ lives. Even though at first sight it may seem that *The Scarlet Letter* is a novel about secret and forbidden love, the truth is that the romance between the two main protagonists serves only as a starting point of the events that come after. As Henry G. Fairbanks states, “[Hawthorne is] absorbed in the moral and psychological circumstances of the act rather than in its lurid circumstances. All action in the romance takes place after the liaison between Hester and Dimmesdale, and no attempt is made to exploit the act for its inherent sensationalism” (984). The plot focuses on three characters that belong to the same Puritan community, the village of Boston, and how each one of them copes with a different sin and its consequences. The main sin to which we are introduced is adultery, committed by the very protagonist, Hester Prynne. Later in the story, we find out about the wicked intentions of Roger Chillingworth, and finally, we discover a revealing and immoral truth about the Puritan minister, Arthur Dimmesdale.

As for the setting, the isolated and strict Puritan community in *The Scarlet Letter* resembles the one to which the author and his forefathers belonged. The village of Boston is very concerned with respecting God's faithfulness and acting as the Puritan doctrine indicates. As Claudia Durst Johnson comments, the sternness of the Puritan atmosphere that Hawthorne created in *The Scarlet Letter* is seen not only in the severe punishment imposed on the female protagonist, Hester Prynne, but also in small details like "the play of the little children who imitate the actions of their elders" (132).

The Scarlet Letter depicts the perpetuation of Puritan devotion across generations. The veneration to God and the respect for Puritan traits are transmitted from one generation to another, from parents to children, very much like it happened in the Hawthorne family, from William to John Hathorne until, along with age, came the changes in the mentality, as it occurred to Hawthorne himself. The Puritan children mimic the cruel acts of their Puritan role models in their play and, as Durst Johnson points out, "these [Puritan] children play at 'scourging Quakers; or taking scalps in sham-fight with the Indians; or scaring one another with freaks of imitative witchcraft'" (132). These are in contrast with Pearl, Hester's daughter, who similarly to Hawthorne, was detached from the Puritan religion, mainly because from the very moment of her birth, she was considered different, like "a demon offspring" (93).

As it occurs in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne portrays the cruelty of Puritan people not only over Hester but also over her innocent child, who is also condemned by the Puritan parishioners to be an outcast as her mother. Because of being born out of adultery, the Puritan community does not see Pearl as entirely human: "In giving her existence a great law had been broken; and the result was a being whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder" (85) and, at some point in the novel, the very mother of the child dithers about this same issue:

It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning at such moments whether Pearl was a human child. (87)

Like her mother, Pearl is outside the community and, despite the characteristic innocence of childhood, she stays away from the colony and does not want to mix with the other children. At times when Pearl passed by the kids of Boston playing “[she] saw, and gazed intently, but never sought to make acquaintance. If spoken to, she would not speak again” (Hawthorne 88), as if she knew she did not fit among them because of being considered an odd kid. Regarding this issue, Nina Baym comments, “[Hester] tries to restrain and discipline the child according to society’s judgements, but her passionate nature—pushed by ostracism into defiance—continues to assert itself” (94 – 95). Although Pearl is just a child, she plays a crucial role in the novel. Pearl is the incarnation of sin, and both the village and Hester are aware of it and thus the mother fears that “some dark and wild peculiarity that should correspond the guiltiness to which [Hester] owned her being” (84) could grow inside the child. As Baym argues, “as an embodiment of Hester’s sin, Pearl is a kind of variant of the scarlet letter” (92), especially because Hester always dresses her in clothes with a scarlet tone, thus making Pearl look like a “scarlet letter endowed with life!” (96). However, this is not the only indication found in the novel about this idea. Pearl’s sinful nature allows her to share a connection with the forest and the natural elements that are found inside it. The forest is explicitly portrayed as a dark and sinful place where “those who brought the guilt and troubles of the world into its bosom – became the playmate of the lonely infant” (194).

As we have already seen, the main theme of the novel is connected to the characters’ acts, but Pearl is not the only one affected by sin. The novel opens with Hester Prynne on the scaffold, forced to show her penance, a letter *A* “in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread” (50) that

hangs from her neck and rests on her chest, meanwhile the townspeople jeer her and even wish her dead. From the very beginning of the narrative, Hester Prynne is declared an adulteress, and therefore punished and condemned to ostracism by the Puritan society to which she belongs. Hester's main role in the story is being the scapegoat, not only because she takes responsibility for a sin which she did not commit by herself and being the only one who has the courage to face the consequences publicly, but also because, as Hester herself realizes at some point in the novel, the rest of the villagers also bear a hidden scarlet letter in their souls (Johnson 132). In contrast to her secret lover, Hester Prynne shows courage and strength; she has no other choice than being brave because she is the only one who can protect her child and also her "fellow-sinner" (64), from the cruelty of the Puritan community and the hands of the devilish Roger Chillingworth. This strength comes from the fact that Hester does not feel guilt nor remorse for the acts she committed because she was moved by true love and passion and, in the moment of her public punishment, she accepts her destiny with no complaint. This attitude of Hester causes a progressive change in the behavior of the townspeople towards her over the years: "The blameless purity of her life during all these years in which she had been set apart to infamy was reckoned largely in her favour" (151). Eventually, Hester Prynne, together with her child, is freed from the burden of carrying the scarlet letter. The end of the novel acts as the beginning of Hester and Pearl's life and, even though the village of Boston had hurt them in the past, Hester decides to return there to rest for good next to her true love.

In contrast to Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, a renowned Puritan minister deeply loved and cherished by his parish, plays the role of the "secret sinner" (Roper 50). He is not only responsible for Hester's exact crime, a sin of passion (Wagenknecht 66), but he is also guilty of "hypocrisy and cowardice" (Waggoner 74). The fact that he conceals his sin from the community makes him guiltier and more peccant than his secret

lover. It takes Dimmesdale many years of torment to finally have the courage to reveal the truth, and he does not do so because of solidarity with Hester but rather because the guilt is killing him slowly. In opposition to Hester, Dimmesdale does not accept his fate and lives with it, instead he is tormented by his guilt until the day he dies. As Nina Baym observes,

[Dimmesdale] never doubts that he deserves to be punished. But to confess his act and receive the punishment that would satisfy his sense of guilt would be to lose his position in society, which he cannot live without. Thus, the very social dependency that makes him condemn himself also keeps him from confessing.”
(68 - 69)

At first, the reverend's remorse appears in different forms, “fasting, flagellation, nights without sleep” (Baym 69) etc, but then it becomes worse, unbearable, when he feels the desire to surrender to evil. Baym says, “Dimmesdale goes briefly insane” (71) and inside him occurs a “total collapse of the self” (Baym 71). His mind and body only desire to do wicked deeds and he finds it very difficult to behave himself because evil is taking control over him. In this episode titled “The Minister in a Maze”, Hawthorne shows that sin and guilt change the reverend and the moral burden with which he deals in secrecy transforms him. Because of his remorse, Dimmesdale, as Baym indicates, “becomes a wonderful preacher and effective counselor. It seems that sin has made him better suited for his work” (70). According to David Levin, “The principle [Dimmesdale] violates is the most important article of Puritan belief and of nineteenth-century romantic individualism: the requirement that a man be a *true* believer, or a *true* confessor, that he revealed to God and to the world what he really is” (52). Nonetheless, Dimmesdale fault is not only selfishness but also cowardice because he approaches the scaffold many times, but he never has enough courage to confess and, when he finally does so, he speaks “in a symbolic language that he knows will be misunderstood” (Baym 69).

However, Roger Chillingworth is, with no doubt, the worst sinner of the three main characters. He is considered to be the “unpardonable sinner” (Roper 50) since his intentions are stimulated by evil. His main goal is to avenge and destroy Arthur Dimmesdale from the inside, from the soul. From the very beginning of the narrative, Hawthorne gives some clues about Chillingworth being the worst sinner of the three main characters, as Arthur Dimmesdale acknowledges, when he tells Hester that they are not “the worst sinners in the world” (185). From his first appearance in the novel, Chillingworth is described in terms of a shady atmosphere that emphasizes his wickedness. He is said to be an old man having a “slight deformity” and he is also compared to a snake, slithering through the crowd. Roger Chillingworth is a master of evil, mainly because he is the devil in disguise, and he gets to fool the entire Puritan town. As Johnson says:

While the community thinks that the Black Man abides in the forest, he actually abides among them in the form of their honored guest and ‘healer’. [...] And while the community believes that witchcraft is practiced somewhere in the depths of the forest, the most heinous black magic is practiced with their approval and cooperation right under their noses in Chillingworth’s laboratory. (136)

Chillingworth arrives in Boston, and no one knows his past nor how he got there. He claims to be a physician and everyone trusts his word, especially Dimmesdale who becomes a close friend of him. As the events occur, Chillingworth is nearer to achieve his goal of destroying Arthur Dimmesdale, but in the process, he “quickly loses his human identity” (Baym 60) and completely becomes the devil on earth. There is a strong connection between the two male protagonists because Chillingworth functions as “Dimmesdale’s alter ego” (Baym 61), something that is best seen when shortly after Reverend Dimmesdale’s death, Chillingworth dies too. This occurs because there is no longer an evil mission for him on earth to complete, but also because he had failed. It is

at the very end, on the scaffold, that Chillingworth shows his true self to the community by publicly admitting that Dimmesdale has escaped him by confessing.

As it was already explained, the three different protagonists carry guilt and sin in different ways. Hester is left with no other choice than face it publicly, meanwhile Dimmesdale copes with the burning truth until the very moment of his death. Something similar happens to Chillingworth, whose real demonic identity is not revealed to the Puritan public until the very end. When the truth is out, Hester Prynne and her daughter experience a restoration in their lives because they are free from their punishment.

The final chapter of *The Scarlet Letter* can be considered as both an end and a beginning in the sense that Hester and Pearl start their own journey. However, for the minister, the end of the novel means the end of his life. From the moment that Hester and him conceived Pearl, Dimmesdale had to carry the remorse and guilt inside his head and soul. He punished himself and was unknowingly punished by Chillingworth as well. It is at the very end of his life when he finds the courage to show the burning scarlet letter of his chest to the entire community. Both Hester and Dimmesdale show an opposite evolution. As the story moves on, Hester learns to live with the consequences of his acts and accepts what her role is whereas Dimmesdale's burning culpability which he secretly bears in his consciousness increases rapidly as the events of the story move on. Nevertheless, this does not prevent the two lovers to rest together for eternity.

3.2 *The House of The Seven Gables* (1851)

When writing *The House of the Seven Gables*, Nathaniel Hawthorne was inspired by his forefathers' past actions. This work is a reflection of Hawthorne's belief in sins as hereditary. The consequences of what Colonel Pyncheon had done many years ago still affect the current Pyncheon generation of the story, similarly to what happened to the

author himself with his ancestors. However, even though Nathaniel Hawthorne always felt guilty and ashamed of what the previous Hawthornes had done, in *The House of The Seven Gables* he addresses the atrocities of his forefathers indirectly to make a statement to denounce the Puritan tenets embodied in his family members, as he does in many of his works like “The Custom House” from *The Scarlet Letter*, “Main-Street”, “The Old Manse” and “Young Goodman Brown”, among others. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the witchcraft hysteria and the persecution of Quakers that had taken place in Salem marked Hawthorne forever and he could not avoid reflecting in his novels the shame he bore inside him.

The House of the Seven Gables was published a year after *The Scarlet Letter* but, even though the two novels are great examples of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s style and share some common elements, they have some differences as well. *The House of The Seven Gables* differs from *The Scarlet Letter* in the fact that, in the first one, the protagonists do not deal with the guilt and moral remorse of committing a sin but they are forced to face the consequences of having to live with the burden of a crime which their forefather committed many centuries ago, whereas in the second one, the protagonists are facing the consequences of a sin that they willingly committed. According to Fredrick Crews, the main issue of *The House of the Seven Gables* is not only the burden of sin but also “patricidal guilt” in the sense that the character of Judge Pyncheon is the symbolic father figure of Hephzibah and Clifford (36).

The House of the Seven Gables opens with the narrator condemning the crime instigated by Colonel Pyncheon and the curse that was put onto him and the future Pyncheon generations yet to come. To write this novel, Nathaniel Hawthorne was inspired and influenced by real historical events like the witch trial of Sarah Good, who put a curse on the judges before being given a guilty sentence. When Good was about to be sentenced,

she “pointed at one of the judges and said, ‘God will give him blood to drink’” (Stern xviii), almost identical to Maule’s curse to the Pyncheon dynasty:

At the moment of execution – with the halter about his neck, and while Colonel Pyncheon sat on horseback, grimly gazing at the scene – Maule had addressed him from the scaffold, and uttered a prophecy, of which history, as well as fireside tradition, has preserved the very words. – “God”, said the dying man, pointing his finger with a ghastly look at the undismayed countenance of his enemy, “God will give him blood to drink!” (8)

Nathaniel Hawthorne was also inspired by a real seven-gabled house that existed and still exists in Salem. By the time he was living there, Hawthorne’s cousin owned a house that had five gables, but she told Nathaniel that it used to have seven. This fact caught Hawthorne’s attention and thus he decided to turn this place into the setting of his third novel (*Buitenhuis* 40). Most of the events of the novel take place inside this house, the Pyncheon mansion, because the two protagonists, Hephzibah and Clifford, have chosen to isolate themselves in order to escape the moral remorse and shame with which they deal. This setting has a peculiar atmosphere which oppresses the main characters and emphasizes their guilt and isolation: “The house might just as well be buried in an eternal fog, while all other houses had the sunshine on them; for not a foot would ever cross the threshold, nor a hand so much as try the door!” (49). The house, together with the portrait of the old colonel Pyncheon, is a perpetuation of the past; it acts as a reminder of the fate from which the characters cannot escape. Near the end of the novel, after Jaffrey’s death, Hephzibah and Clifford feel that they have been redeemed and exonerated from their guilt and they try to run away from Salem and the Pyncheon mansion for good, but they find themselves unable to do so, especially the old spinster who, in her way to freedom, can only see “the seven old peaks” as if “this one old house was everywhere!” (258). Hephzibah’s unbreakable connection with the seven-gabled house is the fictional

representation of the bond that exist between Hawthorne and Salem. In contrast to Hawthorne's previous novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, the Puritan community does not play such a relevant role in *The House of the Seven Gables*, even though the environment is the same. Nonetheless, as it happened to Hester Prynne and her daughter, Clifford and Hepzibah are ostracized as well, especially because they are trying to hide from the circulating rumors that claim that Clifford is a murderer.

The House of The Seven Gables and *The Scarlet Letter* coincide in the fact that the younger generations (Pearl, Hepzibah and Clifford) are collateral damages of the acts of the previous generations. Hepzibah Pyncheon is depicted as a scowled old woman with character who is surrounded by a black atmosphere. From the very beginning the author labels Hepzibah as the poor old spinster who is secluded inside the seven-gabled mansion. Due to her extreme situation of poverty, the old maiden is forced to reopen the family shop, which is considered as something embarrassing by the villagers and herself because the Pyncheon family used to be very wealthy. Becoming a shopkeeper is not easy for Hepzibah, especially because she only receives bad criticism and rude behavior from her neighbors and customers. The family curse, the town gossiping and the presence of Clifford had prevented Hepzibah from going outside into the world and live her own life but, in spite of this, she proves herself to be courageous (Gilmore 5), a characteristic of her personality which connects her with another of Hawthorne's female character, Hester Prynne. Hepzibah is the carer of his brother like Hester was the protector of Dimmesdale. As Michael T. Gilmore states,

Hepzibah strikingly recalls Hester Prynne standing on the scaffold with her badge of shame. Hawthorne's Puritan adulteress, who first appears before the reader in the chapter entitled "The Market-Place," is said to stagger 'under the heavy weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes.' As Hepzibah takes her place behind the counter,

she too is tortured 'with a sense of overwhelming shame, that strange and unloving eyes should have the privilege of gazing' at her. (46)

The novel is like a personal journey for Hepzibah in which she opens herself to development. The evolution of this character is seen progressively throughout the story. At first, she is not glad to have Phoebe in the house of the seven gables, but in the end, she cries of happiness when she and Clifford are reunited with Phoebe at last. Gilmore also observes that Hepzibah could be the literary representation of Hawthorne since both of them share many similarities:

[Hepzibah] resembles her creator both in her history of isolation and her need to earn a living. One thinks immediately of Hawthorne's seclusion for thirteen years after graduating from Bowdoin and his self- designation as 'the obscurest man of letters in America.' It is no wonder that he gives Hepzibah a Puritan progenitor who was involved in the witchcraft trials like his own ancestor John Hathorne, and who appears in his portrait much as William Hathorne is described in "The Custom-House". (176)

Even though it may look so, Hepzibah is not the most affected character by the family's past sin and the greed of their cousin Jaffrey. It is Clifford Pyncheon who suffers the worst consequences. He served a long sentence in prison even though he was not responsible for the death of his uncle. His long stay in jail turned him into a lonely and reticent man. As it happens to Hepzibah, Clifford also experiences a development which is especially influenced by the arrival of Phoebe. Phoebe is the light that comes into the gloomy atmosphere in which the Pyncheons live: "Phoebe soon grew to be absolutely essential to the daily comfort, if not the daily life, of her two forlorn companions. The grime and sordidness of the House of the Seven Gables seemed to have vanished, since her appearance there" (136).

The figure of Judge Pyncheon, who resembles Hawthorne's own ancestor John Hathorne, is the worst sinner in this novel, like Roger Chillingworth from *The Scarlet Letter*. There is no doubt that Judge Pyncheon is an evil character, full of greed, who perpetuates the sin of old Colonel Pyncheon and continues with the curse in the moment of his death. Hawthorne devotes an entire chapter to show the abundant similarities that exist between the current Jaffrey Pyncheon and the old Colonel Pyncheon. In "The Pyncheon of To-day", the narrator states that both Pyncheons are "greedy of wealth" (122). Greed, which Hawthorne believed to be one of the worst sins, apart from instigating the Maule's curse, indicates that the Jaffrey of the present is guilty of the same sin that his forefather committed. As William B. Dillingham states, Judge Pyncheon "represents in his generation a long line of avaricious Pyncheons" (79). As it was mentioned above, Roger Chillingworth and Judge Pyncheon are characters built on a similar pattern. According to Frederick Crews, Jaffrey and Chillingworth are connected because both are the villains of the story (35). Like Chillingworth, Judge Jaffrey is a double-sided character because there is a contrast between what the town thinks about him and what the rest of Pyncheons know about him. "To the world", Dillingham declares, "Judge Pyncheon seems kindly and philanthropic" (79). Everyone in town likes Jaffrey Pyncheon and his characteristic smile which "has brought him every imaginable success" (Gilmore 180). Unlike most people, Hepzibah and Clifford live tormented by Jaffrey, who is the best actor in the novel, because although he is constantly showing interest in helping his cousins, what he really seeks is Clifford's supposed fortune. Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon ends dying in similar strange circumstances as his forefather and, as Frederick Crews affirms, "It is clear that the colonel's 'curse' of susceptibility to sudden death is nothing other than his guilt toward Maule" (38).

Hawthorne closes *The House of the Seven Gables* with a sort happy ending, in which readers see what Edward C. Sampson calls “the triumph of the present, and of good, over the curse of the past” (57). The suffering and moral guilt cease for the remaining Pyncheon family members, and they are physically and spiritually free from the oppressive seven-gabled house at last. However, many critics, like Sampson, agree on that “the evil deeds of the past have not, in truth, been fully redeemed” (58). Sampson continues: “For in Clifford’s life lies Hawthorne’s final point: there are people who are born to be apart from the world, or to be wronged by it, and it is one of the tragedies that their problems have no solution, and that their suffering must be endured” (58-59) because after so many years of self-isolation and guilty conscience, Hepzibah, and especially Clifford, will not be able to adapt themselves to the outside world. At the very end, the remaining Pyncheons experience a restoration of order. When Clifford and Hepzibah reencounter with Phoebe, everything seems to be back in balance: “on beholding [Phoebe], Hepzibah burst into tears. With all her might, she had staggered onward beneath the burden of grief and responsibility, until now that it was safe to fling it down” (308). In addition to this, the later union between Phoebe and Holgrave entails the reconciliation between the Maule and the Pyncheon dynasty.

The Scarlet Letter and *The House of the Seven Gables* are only a couple of examples of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s style, but during his lifetime, Hawthorne wrote many other novels and tales, some of which will be later analyzed to get an insight into how the author’s mind worked.

4 The notions of evil, sin and guilt in “The Minister’s Black Veil” and “Young Goodman Brown”

This final chapter is also concerned with the big influence of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Puritan heritage on his fiction, especially in two very famous tales such as “The Minister’s Black Veil” and “Young Goodman Brown”.

4.1 “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836)

This story, published in 1836, focuses on the figure of Reverend Hooper, minister of a small Puritan town, who one day appears in front of his parishioners wearing a black veil that covers most of his face. Hawthorne’s story, which is full of mystery and ambiguity, leads the readers to reflect on what is the author trying to transmit to the public. In this tale, the notions of sin and guilt appear in the form of a black veil that is consciously worn by the protagonist.

Like in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, the setting of this story is a normal Puritan village called Milford, in which, as Edgar A. Dryden states, “the behavior of the people is as natural and fitting as the sunshine that illuminates their faces” (139). Moreover, as in any other religious village, the figure of the minister carries great authority. Prior to the beginning of the narrative, Mr Hooper is said to be very much admired by the townspeople, but the situation changes when the priest decides to cover his face for eternity as a sign of mourning. As Dryden declares, the veil has the effect of defamiliarizing the reverend from his parishioners (139) because, as the plot moves forward, there is a clear dissociation between the minister and the people of Milford. The townspeople feel disturbed and even uncomfortable by the minister’s veil and thus, they decide to cut ties with the reverend. The veil acts as a wall that separates the preacher from his parishioners, and they grow further apart as time passes. Dealing with the burden of an unspeakable sin turns the minister into an isolated man. The minister admits feeling

lonely behind the veil, “O! you know not how lonely I am, and how frightened, to be alone behind my black veil. Do not leave me in this miserable obscurity forever!” (127). After this confession to Elizabeth, his fiancé, readers can see that the reason for wearing the veil must be really serious since the minister keeps refusing to take off the veil although it is making him wretched. The theme of isolation in connection to sin has already been discussed in the previous chapter of this study which was focused on Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*. However, this recurrent theme is also present in tales like “Young Goodman Brown”, which will be later analyzed.

Like the rest of characters from the story, readers may sense that the black veil is connected to sin and guilt, but this is not all clear since the author plays with ambiguity regarding the crape’s significance. Reverend Hooper’s veil is perceived in many different ways by the different inhabitants of Milford. For most of them, it is a clear symbol of an unpardonable secret sin which the minister must have committed. The townspeople are shocked and even made uncomfortable by the Minister’s accessory because they are certain that behind it lies the most terrible sin which they can picture in their minds. Hawthorne gives the readers some hints about what could be the reasons that led the minister to cover his face. In a footnote, the author himself tells the reader about an actual story of a priest, called Joseph Moody, who accidentally killed a friend and decided to wear a black veil for the rest of his life as a self-inflicted punishment. Nevertheless, Hawthorne neither confirms nor denies that Reverend Hooper and Mr Joseph Moody are the same person.

The veil is the central element of the story and, most certainly, it is an external symbol of sin. However, given its ambiguity, the veil can be perceived in more ways than the “visible” punishment for a secret sin, as Margarita Georgieva states in “The Burden

of Secret Sin: The Fictions of Nathaniel Hawthorne”. Other critics, like Edgar Allan Poe, suggest that the veil symbolizes a crime committed by the minister (Carnochan 182). Readers can also believe that the black piece of cloth acts as an element of sorrow and mourning for the death of someone close to the minister; this conjecture is slightly mentioned in the tale when two people are gossiping about the minister’s veil and one of them affirms that she perceived that “the minister and the maiden’s spirit were walking hand in hand” (124). The minister covers his face right before the funeral of this young lady and the townspeople comment that the minister approached the lady’s corpse to say farewell and as he bends over the coffin, he vaguely showed his face to the dead woman. When talking to his fiancé, the minister himself suggests that there is a possibility that the cause of wearing such a cloth covering his face is due to sorrow. Nevertheless, even when Reverend Hooper is asked by Elizabeth to prove to the townspeople that the crape is not a self-inflicted punishment for a terrible secret sin, he completely refuses to remove the crape from his face. This apparent simple piece of cloth causes the parishioners great discomfort. The first time the minister arrives at church with his face covered, the narrator says that “such was the effect of this simple piece of crape that more than one woman of delicate nerves was forced to leave the meeting-house” (122), but the most surprising fact is the powerful influence of the veil over the minister because, as the narrator confesses to the readers, “Among all its bad influences, the black veil had the one desirable effect, of making its wearer a more effective clergyman” (128). In the previous chapter, it has been said that Arthur Dimmesdale, the character who plays the role of the sinful preacher in *The Scarlet Letter*, was not only affected by the wrongdoing itself but also by the mark that sin left on his chest, a scarlet letter ‘A’. Hooper and Dimmesdale are very similar since both are preachers who bear a hidden and secret remorse. The wickedness to which they decided to surrender causes huge changes in the preachers’ personalities. The main

effect of sin is turning the religious men into the best version of themselves as reverends. Dimmesdale, after letting himself be carried, once again, by the sin of passion, during his way back to town from the forest, desires to commit mischievous actions. However, Dimmesdale gets to fight the inner wicked version of himself by writing the best sermon that he had ever written or delivered. Almost this exact episode takes place in “The Minister’s Black Veil”. The first sermon delivered by Mr Hooper, right after he decides to cover his face, is slightly different from his previous homilies:

The sermon which he now delivered was marked by the same characteristics of style and manner as the general series of his pulpit oratory. But there was something, either in the sentiment of the discourse itself, or in the imagination of the auditors, which made it greatly the most powerful effort that they had ever heard from their pastor’s lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of Mr Hooper’s temperament. The subject had reference to secret sin, and those sad mysteries which we hide from our nearest and dearest, and would fain conceal from our consciousness, even forgetting that the Omniscient can detect them. (122)

As E. Earle Stibitz comments, “the veil so envelops [Hooper] with a cloud of sin or sorrow that neither love nor sympathy can reach him” (189), and he continues, “But the veil also has the supposedly good result of making him an effective minister by enabling him to enter into the dark emotions of agonized sinners” (189). However, the veil also brings the preacher bad consequences. Hooper goes from being the loved priest to “a bugbear” (127). From the moment he covers his face, he becomes the preferred subject for gossiping in the village of Milford. The townspeople fear the minister and start avoiding speaking or meeting with him because they feel he is not himself anymore; in fact, it looks like he has become an obscure version of himself. Some people comment that the veil “makes him ghostlike” (123) and, as J. Hillis Miller states, “It is impossible to be sure the same person is in there, or any person at all” (467). Nevertheless, it is not only the thick black veil what disturbs the Puritan town of Milford, but also the Minister’s

smile. The crape covers most of Hooper's face except for the "sad smile [which] gleamed faintly from beneath the black veil, and flickered about his mouth" (123). The smile raises as many enigmas as the veil. Since people are not able to see the entire minister's face, they are not capable of interpreting the real expression of Hooper's smile because, as Miller affirms, "A smile detached from the rest of the features of a human face is fundamentally ambiguous [...] It is impossible to tell [whether the minister is happy or not], since the meaning of a smile depends on its configuration with the other features of the face" (466).

To give no further explanation to the parishioners, Hooper vaguely says the reason why he wears the veil is as a symbol of mourning, not only for himself but also in the name of the "mankind's evil nature" (Walsh 404). Still, he does not provide the public with a clear answer and thus, "the reason why he thought himself evil is not clear" (Walsh 404). The tale ends and the main enigma is left unsolved for both the characters and the readers, who never get to know what sin Hawthorne had in mind for Mr Hooper. In his death bed, still wearing the black veil and with his characteristic faint smile lingering on his lips, Hooper refuses one last time to confess what had tormented him for so long and tells the people who are around him to look up and notice that everyone wears a black veil. Even though the truth will never be revealed, one thing is clear: as Thomas F. Walsh states, Hopper's intention by wearing the veil is to have "peace of mind in the after-life" (405). According to J. Hillis Miller, the best end Hawthorne could write for Hopper was his death since "Hooper's sin is the sin of irony [and] death and irony have a secret and unsettling alliance" (475).

As J. Hillis Miller states, "The Minister's Black veil" expresses Hawthorne's obsession with the theme of secret sin or guilt (475) and, even though this is a tale, it

concentrates all the characteristic elements of Nathaniel Hawthorne that have already been discussed in some of his novels.

4.2 “Young Goodman Brown” (1835)

“Young Goodman Brown” is set in Salem Village, as many of Hawthorne’s other tales and novels. This short story focuses on Goodman Brown, a Puritan man who sets off a journey during the night to meet the devil and his sinful companions. At the beginning of the narrative, Goodman Brown bids farewell to his wife, Faith, before leaving, but Faith seems to be very concerned about her husband’s business. She begs him to postpone the deed, but Brown responds that the journey must be taken that exact night before sunrise. This opening sets out a dark atmosphere which persists during the entire tale. The fact that the plot takes place during the night and Faith’s extreme preoccupation give the readers the feeling that something bad is coming. This opening looks as if Hawthorne wanted the readers to notice that Faith’s initial worry is a foreshadowing of what happens later in the forest. As it occurs in *The Scarlet Letter*, in “Young Goodman Brown” the relevance of the forest is such that it can be considered a character in itself. The forest is a dangerous place, especially at night, when only wicked and sinful activities take place. As Reginald Cook states, “The symbolic forest of the night is, in effect, young Goodman Brown’s own dark soul where belief turns into doubt, faith into skepticism, and where the people encountered are the adumbrations of his daily familiars and ancestral past” (479).

As it also occurs in “The Minister’s Black Veil”, Nathaniel Hawthorne never tells the readers directly what sin was committed by Goodman Brown and, as D. M. McKeithan states, “By not identifying the sin Hawthorne gives the story a wider application. Which sin it was does not greatly matter: what Hawthorne puts the stress on is the idea that this sin had evil consequences” (96). However, this story is slightly

different from other Hawthorne's works because in "Young Goodman Brown" readers can witness what happens before, during and after committing a sin, instead of only seeing the consequences of sinning, as it has been analyzed so far. As it was previously mentioned, it is Goodman Brown's own choice to meet the devil. However, he is not entirely sure of his decision since, on his way to the forest, he doubts and worries about what he is about to do and what is going to happen to his wife. As Paul J. Hurley comments in "Young Goodman Brown's 'Heart of Darkness'", Goodman Brown accepts meeting with the devil, but he is not aware of how deep in the forest he is going to go (413), and when he notices it, he wants to leave. The Devil manages to convince him to stay and introduces Goodman Brown to other people of Salem that have already signed their names in the Black Man's Book. Hawthorne uses real characters from Salem's past as a way of criticizing the Puritan atrocities and to contribute to the credibility of the story. One of these historical characters is Sarah Cloyse, in the story Goody Cloyse, who was accused of witchcraft and whose case was examined by John Hathorne. Brown recognizes Goody Cloyse as the "very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism in his youth" (87 – 88). As Hurley states, "Hawthorne's use of Goody Cloyse and her reference to Martha Carrier remind us that they were actual historical personages unjustly accused by twisted 'youngsters'" (414). Hawthorne also brings into the story the figure of Deacon Gookin, who plays the role of the minister of Salem Village, and who in real life was a colonial magistrate that worked with William Hathorne. Nathaniel Hawthorne not only mentions some real personages but also some historical events that took place during the witchcraft hysteria like King Phillip's War and the persecution of Quakers. Regarding this issue, Michael J. Colacurcio says, "Hawthorne had been intensively interested in the mentality of declining Puritanism; and here he associates the experience

of Goodman Brown not only with the context of witchcraft [...] but also with the pervasive moral quality of that mentality” (433).

During his stay in the forest, Goodman Brown expresses a few times that he wants to go back home to the arms of his wife, but he never has the initiative to leave nor shows much resistance when the Devil asks him to stay. At some point in the narrative, Brown is seen reflecting on his journey. He clings to the little faith in God he has left and to the love he feels for his wife to prevent himself from surrendering to evil:

He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a Heaven above him. Yet, there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it. ‘With Heaven above, and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!’ cried Goodman Brown. (90)

Absorbed in his thoughts, Brown is brought back to reality when he hears a familiar voice, the voice of Faith. It is in this moment when the situation suffers an important shift. Goodman Brown thinks that everything is lost for him and, in an act of desperation, he submits himself to the Devil: “My Faith is gone! [...] There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come devil, for to thee is this world given” (91).

Faith’s role is crucial in the story. As Paul J. Hurley declares, Faith is both a character and a symbol, because “Hawthorne concentrates so insistently on Faith’s ribbons, and their effect on Goodman Brown is so devastating, that one may assume they were intended as an important symbol” (416). The presence of Faith is essential since she represents Brown’s “religious faith” (McKeithan 94). Before leaving the house, Goodman Brown is self-conscious of what he is doing and believes that he is already redeemed from his sin merely because he is married to a good woman who looks like “a blessed angel on earth” (85). Goodman Brown is sure that, in spite of the terrible things that may happen that night in the woods, he will be able to “cling to her skirts and follow her to Heaven” (85) and, as readers are told by the narrator, “Goodman Brown felt himself justified in

making more haste on his present evil purpose” (84). Hurley speaks of this episode as sarcastic because the irony “resides primarily in the implication that Goodman Brown intends to get to heaven by clinging to the ‘skirts’ of faith rather than by virtue of his own character or actions” (412). What Goodman Brown ignores at the beginning of the story is that Faith will find herself in a similar situation: lost in the forest and tempted by the devil.

At the end of the narrative, the author raises the question whether the events of the forest were true or part of a dream. If it was a dream, it may be possible that it was instigated by guilt, but readers are never told directly why the protagonist feels guilty. Jerome Loving maintains that there is a possibility that “Brown has done something wrong, perhaps committed adultery, and the dream functions as a transfer mechanism for his guilt” (221). Brown comes back home, but nothing seems to be back to normal. He cannot stand the words of the priest, he wakes up in the middle of the night distressed, etc., but the most important fact is that Goodman Brown is unable to trust his neighbors or his wife anymore and the rest of his life becomes a living death. As Hurley comments, after the encounter between the Devil and most of the townspeople of Salem,

Only Goodman Brown has changed. If the events of the night before had been real, or even symbolic of reality, would not Hawthorne have indicated in some way a shared knowledge between Goodman Brown and the townsfolk whom he sees? Hawthorne has told us that Brown did not know whether his wife obeyed his cry to look up to heaven. Nonetheless, he passes her without a greeting when she runs to meet him. His own distrust and suspicion have assured him that she is sinful, even though, as Hawthorne is careful to note, she is wearing the pink ribbons which Goodman Brown thought he had grasped from the air. (418)

As Hurley declares, “Goodman Brown’s dying hour is gloomy because the evil in his own heart overflows; he sees a world darkened by the dreariness of sin” (412). After the episode in the forest, Goodman Brown lives tormented by the revealing truth that he found out that night. The deathbed of Goodman Brown resembles the deathbed of Mr

Hooper from Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil". Both characters are tortured by sin and guilt until they die. They take with them their secrets and they are aware that everyone hides some darkness inside. Mr Hooper wears a black veil for his own sin but also because of mankind's evil; he acknowledges that he is not the only sinner in his community and the entire world. Goodman Brown also finds out the townspeople's evil nature and therefore, he cannot be the man he was before going into the woods.

Some critics consider "Young Goodman Brown" to be an allegory rather than a tale since it not only tells the misdeeds of the protagonist but also transmits moral lessons. The symbolism and the imagery used by Hawthorne when writing this piece also contribute to the idea that this is an allegorical story. As Paul J. Hurley suggests, Faith and her pink ribbons are the primary allegorical elements found in this short story (416). According to Thomas E. Connolly, the story shows "Hawthorne's criticism of Calvinism" (373). Goodman Brown introduces himself as a man who belongs to "a race of honest men and good Christians" (86), which is ironic since he claims to be a model Puritan, and still, he is willingly meeting the devil. In "Young Goodman Brown", Hawthorne not only criticizes Calvinism and Puritanism, but by referring to Brown's honorable Puritan ancestors he is criticizing his own forefathers. The protagonist of the story claims himself to be a good Christian like his ancestors, but from the very beginning readers are aware that he is not as honorable as he says he is. In addition to meeting with the devil, the narrator mentions that there is a connection between the devil and the protagonist by saying that both of them look alike. The resemblance between the two is such that "they might have been taken for father and son" (86). Maybe with this description of the devil, Hawthorne's intention is to portray Goodman Brown's evil self. Even though the protagonist tries to convince himself that he is a good man, as his own name indicates, the truth is that there is a part of him who is attracted to evil. Through the character of

Goodman Brown, Hawthorne portrays in his narrative the loss of faith in connection to sin. Something similar happens to Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, who also loses all her faith in God and the people that surround her when she is severely punished and rejected by all of them. Like Hester, Goodman Brown chooses to trust only himself and live on his own for the rest of his life.

Young Goodman Brown is not the only character in Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction that experiences meeting the devil face to face. The protagonist of "Ethan Brand", a tale published in 1852, is said to be the worst of the sinners among Hawthorne's characters. Like Goodman Brown, Brand also meets the devil repeatedly and they even become good friends. Brand comes back to his village after many years gone looking for the unpardonable sin and claims that he has found it. He declares to the villagers that the Unpardonable Sin "is a sin that grew within [his] own breast" (259). Nathaniel Hawthorne is similar to Brand in the sense that in his search for materials for his writing, he also lost some of his sanity when he found out about an unpardonable sin that involved his family. After almost twenty years searching for the unpardonable sin, Ethan Brand becomes "a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment" (265). Maybe this is a reflection of what happened to Hawthorne when he secluded himself. Brand goes searching for the unpardonable sin, but the results of his research are bad: the unpardonable sin resides in himself, as it happened to Hawthorne when investigating and searching for materials to start his literary career, he found out terrible facts concerning his ancestors.

Conclusion

After reading very carefully and comparing different Nathaniel Hawthorne's works, it is clear that Hawthorne tried to distance himself from Puritanism, but this religion was rooted in his heritage, he carried it in his blood and thus, he had no other

choice than learning to live with that “stain upon the soul”, as he used to call it (Mills 93). As it has been already proved, Puritan tenets like sin and guilt are predominant elements in Hawthorne’s life and literature. When studying Nathaniel Hawthorne’s literary projection, it is also important not to forget the role of Salem since, like Puritanism, Hawthorne’s birthplace represents an important element in his identity. It is in “The Custom – House”, Hawthorne’s most intimate work, where the author addresses his ambivalent feelings with regards to these issues. However, even though Puritanism and Salem caused the writer great anxiety, Hawthorne eventually moved from complete rejection to learning how to embrace the place where he came from.

An important conclusion drawn from the analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s writings is that the author leaves a piece of himself in every character and every story. Hester and Dimmesdale, Hepzibah and Clifford, Mr Hooper and Goodman Brown are all affected by guilt and sin in one way or another, as the author experienced during his lifetime. No matter the story nor the protagonist, readers can always find a resemblance between the fictional character and the author.

Hawthorne showed himself to be a great author given the fact that he managed to use literature as a tool to relieve his guilt. Through writing, Hawthorne’s intention was to expose to the world the cruelties and atrocities that were committed by the Puritan people. He believed that it was best to know the cruel and harsh events of history, regardless of how hard they might be, to avoid repeating those same mistakes. Hawthorne was able to acknowledge the failures of his forefathers and, even though he was linked to them by strong family ties, he put ahead his ideology and beliefs and decided to step away from his own blood. Without second thoughts, Hawthorne used his talented works to publicly denounce the strong shame and rejection which he felt for what his forefathers had done. Another relevant conclusion drawn from this study is the fact that Hawthorne found in

writing a way of calming the tormenting past that chased him until the end of his days. The results of this ‘literary therapy’ that he carried out became an amazing collection of works whose importance endures in the present and are still found relevant from a thematic perspective although they were published many years ago.

Nathaniel Hawthorne never denied the existence of wickedness nor sin, but in contrast to the ideology in which he was raised, he firmly believed in redemption. As D. M. McKeithan affirms, “Hawthorne himself believed that evil impulses visit every human heart, but he did not believe that most men are mainly evil or that most men convert any considerable proportion of their evil impulses into evil deeds” (95). Hawthorne acknowledged that everybody was a sinner to a greater or lesser extent, thus he refused to be like his forefathers or other Puritan members who boast of being innocent and respectful to God. In *The Scarlet Letter* or in “The Minister’s Black Veil”, the author criticizes the hypocrisy of these people since in both stories, the priests are the sinful ones. Mr Hooper and Dimmesdale are supposed to be more loyal to God and, as Puritan preachers, they are meant to be the ones that educate the parishioners and guide them through the path of good. In “Young Goodman Brown,” Hawthorne appeals once again to the Puritan hypocrisy. The protagonist of this tale also brags about being a good Christian man while he is meeting with the devil voluntarily. Besides believing in pardon, Hawthorne was very much concerned with respecting people’s freedom. This is well exemplified by the protagonist of *The Scarlet Letter*. In this novel Hawthorne shows a woman who committed a crime, but who did not deserve such a severe punishment since her sin was only that serious in the sight of Puritanism because it involved passion. In Hawthorne’s opinion, there are multiple kinds of sin and each one of them should be punished according to its severity.

Unquestionably, Nathaniel Hawthorne is a great author and artist who plays not only with the burden of his past, but he also incorporates a complex imagery and symbolism into his writings. Since the novels and stories analyzed in this project are only a small part of the huge in-depth study that can be carried out of Hawthorne's works, it would be interesting to keep analyzing other important issues in Hawthorne's fiction apart from the subject-matter. Symbolism and imagery gain a lot of prominence in Hawthorne's writings. The emblems, the motifs, the colors or the play with light and shadow, to mention a few examples, are always connected to the themes. Hester's scarlet letter, Mr Hooper's black veil or the gloomy seven-gabled house are elements that should be paid attention to in order to extract from the story all the important references that are concealed inside Hawthorne's narratives. The contrast between light and dark in Hawthorne's fiction could be understood as a reflection of the contrast that exists between good and evil. Nathaniel Hawthorne also carried a light and a dark burden inside his mind and soul. This duality inside the author may be a representation of the good and bad consequences of his heritage. Hawthorne was doomed to live with an internal fight between his beliefs and his Puritan past. Therefore, the author was never able to get rid of that part of himself because one of these parts could not exist without the other.

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