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Nathaniel Hawthorne, Atheist

Several “studies of the general population have shown that those with higher IQs tend not to believe in God” (Attwood). These intellectual elites are scientists, professors, philosophers and authors. Pairing this study with the undeniable intellect of Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose novel “*The Scarlet Letter* was an instant best-seller.” (Tony P) having sold four thousand copies in the first 10 days, and the obvious anti-puritan beliefs in *The Scarlet Letter*, it is easy to deduce that Nathaniel Hawthorne is an atheist. *The Scarlet Letter* is about Hester Prynne, a puritan woman who committed adultery when her husband was gone, with the beloved town minister, Arthur Dimmesdale. The proof of their crime was their daughter Pearl. Hester refused to tell who got her pregnant so The Minister Dimmesdale, was free of punishment from the town, but not his guilt. As Hester's punishment she is required to wear a red “A” on her chest for the rest of her life so everyone knows her as an adulterer.

First of all, a great number of subtle and obvious anti-Puritan/religion tones exist in *The Scarlet Letter*. These inserts from *The Scarlet Letter* give us a window to gaze into Hawthorne's mind and piece together what Hawthorne truly believed about religion. By taking these small pieces of writing and piecing them together, like the many intricate pieces of a puzzle, a number of readers have figured out that Hawthorne has a great number of negative feelings towards religion. Hawthorne notes how the puritans punish

those who aren't aligned with what the bible teaches by "the frequent application of the rod, enjoined with spiritual authority" (62). Hawthorne continues to say that this beating isn't just a way to punish those who have sinned; it is also a "wholesome regimen for the growth and promotion of all childish virtues." (62) or at least the virtues that the puritans wish their children to have. In Hawthorne's eyes this is more than just a way to punish those who don't follow the puritan religion, it is also a way to brainwash the youth to grow up into good puritan men and women who beat their children along with their enemies, all in the name of God. Hawthorne does not support these beliefs and that's why he addresses them in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne continues to mention the intolerance of those who are different in the puritan village. Maybe this is one of the reasons the puritans are no longer around, people who shun others because they are different cannot survive in the modern world, and Hawthorne thought that the puritans were "the most intolerant brood that ever lived" (64). Hawthorne has many small messages regarding how he feels about the puritans and their practices, and none of them are positive things to say the least.

Furthermore, Nathaniel Hawthorne believes that some of the most religious people are sometimes the "worst of sinners"(99) and simply use religion to cover it up. Like Dimmesdale the town's minister who committed adultery, or Bellingham who is the governor of the puritan village but instead of "(manifesting) plainness, (embracing) simplicity."(Lao Tzu) and being down to earth as the puritan religion calls for, he lives in a "Mansion." (68) Simply because Governor Bellingham is taking advantage of his position. This in itself isn't a sin, but pretending to be better than material wealth like the puritans so often did then living in a mansion is indeed being hypocritical, and that's

exactly how Hawthorne saw many puritans. Another reason Hawthorne is an atheist was because of how he felt about how the puritans killed off those they deemed “witches” such as the Salem witch trials. In fact in his stories the Salem outburst was a “terrible delusion,” a “universal madness,” in which “innocent persons” “died wrongfully” (Joseph R. Modugno) Hawthorne has such a strong feeling about this injustice because some of his ancestors were involved in the dark and deadly trials, so Hawthorne knows the evil that can come from religion and knows many that would still be alive if it wasn't for the injustices of religion.

Some people may say that Hawthorne is not an atheist he just simply doesn't believe that the puritan religion is the correct religion. While they may have a point, it is highly unlikely that they are correct, because if hypocrisy, greed and the unnecessary violence are the reasons why he doesn't believe puritans are the correct religion, then he can look at all other religions and most of them will be the same if not worse. That is why Hawthorne is an atheist and not agnostic or something else. Imagine all the innocent people that would be alive today if there were no religious fanatics that killed them simply for being different. Do you believe, as Hawthorne does, that the world will be better when religion is replaced by logic and reason?

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