

SAMPLE PAGES OF A RESEARCH PAPER IN MLA STYLE

James Fang

Fang 1

Mrs. Mortenson

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What was Nathaniel Hawthorne's view of his Puritan ancestors, and how is this reflected in
The Scarlet Letter?

In 1637, the Hathorne family settled in Salem and began a tumultuous history of success, piety, and notoriety (Hoeltje 16). Two hundred years later, Nathaniel Hawthorne, descendant of the proud Hathorne family, could not escape his Puritan roots. Hawthorne was very aware of his family's unsavory past and attempted to distance himself from it, even adding a "w" to his surname. However, at the same time, some of the ideals and principles of the Puritans carried on into Hawthorne's own life. In the end, he was trapped between his Puritan-like habits and his dislike for the infamous deeds of his Puritan ancestors, ultimately expressing his love-hate relationship in his writing, The Scarlet Letter.

Hawthorne's outlook of Puritans came mostly from his family background. Even when young, he was aware of the acts of his ancestors. He had long heard of the exploits of his ancestor William Hathorne, who had come to Boston with John Winthrop and had ordered the Quakeress Ann Coleman whipped; yet he also upheld justice and hanged a man for shooting an Indian. William Hathorne's son, John, played the role of judge in the infamous Salem Witch Trials and argued vehemently that those accused be given the death penalty (16). With such horrific, immoral acts conducted by his ancestors, Hawthorne could not help but be appalled by Puritan hypocrisy. However, as in the case of William Hathorne, not all acts were purely immoral. Hawthorne realized that the "strong traits of his first Puritan forebears had intertwined themselves with his" (22). Hearing stories about these

figures of his past, Hawthorne became trapped between the cruelty of his ancestors and their strong convictions for a purified, pious life.

Hawthorne's early development of conflicting views of his ancestors developed into his ambivalent view towards all of past Puritan society, with one half of Hawthorne tending to find Puritan doctrine to be quite suitable for him. As critic Larzer Ziff observed, "Hawthorne came more and more to see the relevance of the Puritan philosophy to the effects he desired from his art" (250). Like the Puritans, Hawthorne came to believe that writing purely about religion would be "stupendous impertinence" (251). And by following in the trend of Romantics of the period by being attracted to...

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