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THE ROLE OF GUILT AND PURGATION
IN
HAWTHORNE

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In order to fully comprehend the role of guilt and purgation in Hawthorne's major works some understanding of the heritage of the Puritans and the tenets of Calvinism is necessary, for the feelings of guilt which encompass the characters stem from their religious teachings.

The belief in the Elect is one of the significant doctrines which appears and reappears throughout the pages of Hawthorne's writing. In essence this is the belief that even before birth God has selected those who will be saved and those who will be damned; an individual can do nothing to effect his own salvation as it is all predestined.

The innate depravity of man coincides closely with the belief in the Elect. This is a reinforcement of the evil of men, the non-elect who are evil because it is their nature to be so, and they can never hope to rise above the evil which permeates their souls.

Another important component of their belief is that referring to the situation surrounding sufficient grace. This deals with the fact that God possesses enough grace to save those he chooses to--not through works of their own, but by the grace of God are they saved.

The Puritans eased their own consciences in persecuting children through the belief that the sins of the parents are

visited on the children. If parents have erred, it was natural to expect the children to suffer for it.

The belief in public confession and public punishment was a strong force in Puritan New England. A sinner was publically exposed and young and old alike revelled in observing the punishment meted out to the poor unfortunate whose evil deeds had been discovered.

All of these practices and beliefs are illustrated in the works to be covered. The sketches of "Young Goodman Brown" and "The Minister's Black Veil" depict the results of spiritual isolation resulting from the individual's awareness of the sinfulness of himself or his fellow men. Their attempt at atonement is their isolation from fellow human beings.

"Ethan Brand" deals with the search for the unforgivable sin, the violation of the sanctity of the human heart, only to discover he has committed the sin in the heartless experiments he engaged in while attempting to isolate the sin. In the attempt to purge his soul of his evil deeds, he takes his own life.

"Roger Malvin's Burial" is perhaps the most unusual of the sketches. Reuben suffers guilt feelings without justification; he blames himself for Malvin's death and purges himself from his guilt by actually committing a crime--the killing of his own son.

The Scarlet Letter deals with the psychology of sin and guilt as it affects Puritans involved in adultery and their

reaction to the punishment which followed the act.

The House of the Seven Gables aptly illustrates the belief that the sins of the parents are visited on the children. The Pyncheon clan suffers for generations under the curse which was imposed on the Colonel for his evil doing. The uniting of the Pyncheons, the guilty party, with the Maules, those who had been exploited, expiates the guilt, and the curse is negated.

The Marble Faun deals with the initiation of a pure and innocent man, Donatello, into the fraternity of evil, sin, and guilt. The expiation for his guilt is his imprisonment.

Though, to a large extent, there is a close alliance of theme and content in Hawthorne's writing, it is the insight, perception, and artistry he brings to his works which makes for the interest and enjoyment for the reader.