

puritanism in young goodman brown

puritanism in young goodman brown shapes the heart of Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic narrative, influencing its mood, themes, and characterization. This article explores how the strict moral codes and religious beliefs of Puritan society permeate "Young Goodman Brown," affecting the protagonist's inner conflict and the story's symbolism. Readers will gain insight into Hawthorne's critique of Puritanism, the historical context of the Salem witch trials and New England, and the lasting literary impact of Puritan values. By analyzing characters, motifs, and Hawthorne's narrative techniques, the article reveals how Puritanism drives the psychological drama and underlying messages of the tale. Whether you are a student, educator, or literature enthusiast, this comprehensive guide will deepen your understanding of Puritanism in "Young Goodman Brown" and its significance within American literature. Let's examine the major aspects, historical background, and thematic richness that make this story a profound study of faith, morality, and human nature.

- Historical Context of Puritanism in "Young Goodman Brown"
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Historical Context of Puritanism in "Young Goodman Brown"

Understanding the historical backdrop of Puritanism is essential to grasping its role in "Young Goodman Brown." The Puritans were a religious group who settled in New England during the early 17th century, seeking to purify the Church of England and establish a community based on strict moral codes. Their worldview emphasized predestination, original sin, and unwavering adherence to scripture. In Hawthorne's story, these beliefs create a tense and judgmental atmosphere that shapes every character's actions.

Hawthorne sets his tale in Salem, Massachusetts, a town infamous for the

witch trials and religious hysteria. The story draws on real historical anxieties about sin, temptation, and spiritual integrity. By weaving these elements into his narrative, Hawthorne invites readers to question how Puritanism affected individual psychology and social dynamics. The focus on secret guilt, public reputation, and spiritual anxiety reflects the era's preoccupation with salvation and damnation.

Puritan Society and Its Impact

The rigid rules of Puritan society dictated not only religious practice but also everyday behavior. The fear of moral failure and public shame created an environment where suspicion and self-doubt flourished. "Young Goodman Brown" captures this atmosphere, portraying a community where even the most respected members may harbor hidden sins. The town's leaders, ministers, and ordinary citizens are all subject to the pressures of living up to Puritan ideals.

- Emphasis on Original Sin and Human Corruption
- Strict Codes of Conduct and Social Surveillance
- Religious Authority and Communal Conformity
- Legacy of Witch Trials and Fear of the Devil

Puritan Beliefs and Values Portrayed in the Story

Hawthorne's depiction of Puritan beliefs is central to the plot and themes of "Young Goodman Brown." The protagonist's journey into the forest serves as an allegory for the struggle between faith and doubt, good and evil. Puritan values such as piety, humility, and suspicion of pleasure are reflected in Goodman Brown's internal conflict. The story explores how these beliefs can foster both moral strength and psychological torment.

Faith, Guilt, and Temptation

Goodman Brown's faith is tested as he encounters figures from his community in the forest, each seemingly complicit in devilish activities. The narrative challenges the Puritan notion that outward appearances reflect inner righteousness. Hawthorne uses this tension to highlight the complexity of human morality, suggesting that guilt and temptation are universal experiences – even among the most devout.

The story's emphasis on secret sin and the possibility of hypocrisy mirrors the Puritan obsession with spiritual purity. Goodman Brown's inability to reconcile his faith with the reality of human imperfection leads to disillusionment and alienation.

Duality of Public and Private Morality

Puritanism in "Young Goodman Brown" is marked by the contrast between public virtue and private vice. The townspeople's participation in the forest's secret ritual suggests that moral failings are often hidden beneath a façade of piety. Hawthorne critiques the dangers of judgment and the impossibility of achieving absolute purity, showing how these pressures can lead to isolation and despair.

Symbolism and Puritan Influence

Symbolism is a powerful tool Hawthorne uses to examine Puritan themes. Nearly every element in "Young Goodman Brown" carries symbolic meaning related to Puritan ideology. The forest, for example, represents the unknown, temptation, and spiritual danger. Goodman Brown's wife, Faith, serves as a literal and figurative symbol of religious conviction.

The Forest as a Symbol of Sin and Temptation

In Puritan thought, the wilderness was often seen as a domain of evil, chaos, and the devil. Hawthorne uses the forest as the setting for Goodman Brown's journey, highlighting the protagonist's fear of losing his moral compass. The deeper Brown ventures, the more he confronts the ambiguity of good and evil, reflecting Puritan anxieties about the fragility of faith.

Faith: Character and Concept

Faith, Goodman Brown's wife, symbolizes both his personal religious beliefs and the broader concept of spiritual trust. When Brown sees Faith's pink ribbons in the forest, it signifies his fear that innocence and goodness can be corrupted. The loss of Faith – both the person and the idea – marks Brown's descent into doubt and cynicism.

- Forest: Temptation, Evil, the Unknown
- Pink Ribbons: Innocence, Fragility of Faith
- The Staff: Satanic Influence, Loss of Innocence
- The Congregation: Universal Sin and Hypocrisy

Character Analysis: Goodman Brown and Puritan Identity

Goodman Brown is the embodiment of a young Puritan struggling with the demands of his faith. His journey reflects the psychological consequences of rigid religious expectations. Brown's initial confidence in his righteousness is shattered when he witnesses respected members of his community consorting with the devil. The experience transforms him, leaving him distrustful and spiritually isolated.

Internal Conflict and Loss of Innocence

Brown's internal conflict captures the essence of Puritan anxiety. Torn between loyalty to his faith and suspicion of universal depravity, he undergoes a profound transformation. His inability to reconcile the reality of sin with the ideals of Puritanism leads to a loss of innocence and a bleak outlook on human nature.

Alienation and Disillusionment

After his encounter in the forest, Goodman Brown becomes alienated from his community. He can no longer trust those around him, nor can he find comfort in his faith. This disillusionment is a direct result of the Puritan emphasis on hidden sin and the impossibility of attaining spiritual perfection. Hawthorne uses Brown's fate to comment on the psychological toll of strict religious orthodoxy.

Hawthorne's Critique of Puritanism

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" is widely interpreted as a critique of Puritanism. Through irony, ambiguity, and symbolism, Hawthorne exposes the dangers of moral absolutism and religious hypocrisy. He suggests that an excessive focus on sin and judgment can erode community trust and individual well-being.

Irony and Ambiguity

Hawthorne employs irony throughout the story to highlight the gap between appearance and reality. The revelation that trusted leaders participate in sinful acts undermines the moral authority of the Puritan community. Hawthorne's ambiguous ending – whether Brown's experience was a dream or

reality – reinforces the uncertainty inherent in religious belief and the impossibility of moral certainty.

Psychological Effects of Puritanism

The psychological impact of Puritanism on Goodman Brown is profound. His obsession with purity and fear of damnation lead to paranoia, isolation, and despair. Hawthorne warns against the destructive potential of rigid dogma, advocating instead for compassion, humility, and a more nuanced understanding of human nature.

Puritanism's Legacy in American Literature

The themes of Puritanism in “Young Goodman Brown” resonate throughout American literature. Hawthorne’s exploration of faith, guilt, and hypocrisy influenced later writers and contributed to the development of psychological and gothic fiction. The story remains a key text for understanding the complexities of American religious identity and the cultural legacy of Puritanism.

Influence on Literary Movements

Hawthorne’s work helped shape the American Romantic and Dark Romantic movements, which emphasized individual conscience, inner conflict, and the darker aspects of human experience. The legacy of Puritanism continues to inspire authors who grapple with questions of morality, society, and personal responsibility.

Enduring Relevance

“Young Goodman Brown” endures as a powerful reflection on the human condition. Its portrayal of Puritanism invites readers to consider the balance between faith and doubt, the nature of evil, and the limits of moral judgment. Hawthorne’s story remains relevant to contemporary discussions about belief, community, and psychological health.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the significance of Puritanism in “Young

Goodman Brown”?

A: Puritanism is central to the story’s themes and setting, shaping the protagonist’s internal conflict and the community’s moral atmosphere. Hawthorne uses Puritan values to explore the dangers of moral absolutism, hypocrisy, and spiritual anxiety.

Q: How does Hawthorne critique Puritan beliefs in the story?

A: Hawthorne critiques Puritanism by highlighting its tendency to foster suspicion, isolation, and psychological distress. He portrays the impossibility of achieving absolute purity and the damage caused by judgmental attitudes.

Q: What are some symbolic elements that represent Puritan themes?

A: Key symbols include the forest (temptation and evil), Faith’s pink ribbons (innocence and fragile faith), the staff (satanic influence), and the congregation (universal hypocrisy and hidden sin).

Q: How does Puritanism affect Goodman Brown’s character?

A: Goodman Brown’s strict adherence to Puritan beliefs leads to internal conflict, loss of innocence, and eventual alienation from his community. His experience reflects the psychological effects of rigid religious expectations.

Q: Why is the setting of Salem important in the story?

A: Salem’s history of witch trials and religious hysteria reinforces the story’s themes of suspicion, fear, and moral judgment, providing a realistic backdrop for Hawthorne’s critique of Puritanism.

Q: What role does faith play in “Young Goodman Brown”?

A: Faith, both as a character and a concept, symbolizes Goodman Brown’s religious beliefs and trust in human goodness. Her apparent corruption marks Brown’s descent into doubt and disillusionment.

Q: How does Hawthorne use ambiguity in the story?

A: Hawthorne's ambiguous ending – leaving readers unsure if Brown's experience was real or a dream – underscores the uncertainty of religious belief and the complexity of moral judgment.

Q: What is the legacy of Puritanism in American literature?

A: Puritan themes in "Young Goodman Brown" influenced American Romanticism and Dark Romanticism, inspiring authors to explore inner conflict, morality, and the darker aspects of human nature.

Q: How does the story reflect the psychological impact of Puritanism?

A: The story illustrates the psychological toll of strict religious dogma, showing how fear, guilt, and suspicion can lead to isolation and despair.

Q: Why does Goodman Brown lose trust in his community?

A: Goodman Brown loses trust after witnessing the apparent participation of respected townspeople in sinful acts, which reveals the hidden hypocrisy within his Puritan community.

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puritanism in young goodman brown: Hawthorne's Wilderness: Nature and Puritanism in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and "Young Goodman Brown" Marina Boonyaprasop, 2013-05-22 Nathaniel Hawthorne is one of America's most noted and highly praised writers, and a key figure in US literature. Although, he struggled to become an acknowledged author for most parts of his life, his work stands in the limelight of the American literary consciousness (Graham 5). For he is a direct descendant of Massachusetts Bay colonists in the Puritan era of the 17th and 18th century, New England served as a lifelong preoccupation for Hawthorne, and inspired many of his best-known stories. Hence, in order to understand the author and his work, it is crucial to apprehend the historical background from which his stories arose. The awareness of the Puritan legacy in Hawthorne's time, and their Calvinist beliefs which contributed to the establishment of American

identity, serve as a basis for fathoming the intention behind Hawthorne's writings. His forefathers' concept of wilderness became an important part of their religious life, and in many of Hawthorne's tales, nature can be perceived as an active agent for the plot and the moral message. Therefore, it is indispensable to consider the development behind the Puritan perception, as well as the prevailing opinion on nature during the writer's lifetime. After the historical background has been depicted, the author himself is focused. His ambiguous character and non-persistent lifestyle are the source of many themes which can be retrieved from his works. Thus, understanding the man behind the stories is necessary in order to analyze the tales themselves. Seclusion, nature, and Puritanism are constantly recurring topics in the author's life and work. To become familiar with Hawthorne's relation to nature, his ancestors, and religion, it is essential to understand the vast amount of symbols his stories. His stories will be brought into focus, and will be analyzed on the basis of the historical and biographical facts, and further, his particular style and purpose will be taken into consideration. The second part of t

puritanism in young goodman brown: Gothic Elements and Religion in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Fiction Wendy C. Graham, 1999

puritanism in young goodman brown: Pynchon and History Shawn Smith, 2013-11-05 First Published in 2005. While many previous books on Pynchon allude to his fictional engagement with historical events and figures, this book explores Pynchon as a historical novelist and, by extension, historical thinker. The book interprets Pynchon's four major novels *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Vineland*, and *Mason & Dixon* through the prism of historical interpretation and representation. In doing so, it argues that Pynchon's innovative narrative techniques express his philosophy of history and historical representation through the form of his texts.

puritanism in young goodman brown: Loose Ends Russell Reising, 1996 In this study of American cultural production from the colonial era to the present, Russell Reising takes up the loose ends of popular American narratives to craft a new theory of narrative closure. In the range of works examined here--from Phillis Wheatley's poetry to Herman Melville's *Israel Potter*, from Henry James's *The Jolly Corner* to the Disney Studio's *Dumbo*--Reising finds endings that violate all existing theories of closure and narratives that expose the often unarticulated issues that inspired these texts. Reising suggests that these non-endings entirely refocus the narrative structures they appear to conclude, accentuate the narrative stresses and ideological fissures that the texts seem to suppress, and reveal shadow narratives that trail alongside the dominant story line. He argues that unless the reader notices the ruptures in the closing moments of these works, the social and historical moments in which the narrative and the reader are embedded will be missed. This reading not only offers new interpretive possibilities, but also uncovers startling affinities between the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and the fiction of Henry James, between Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* and Melville's least-studied novel, and between Emily Dickinson's poem *I Started Early--Took My Dog* and Disney's animated classic. Pursuing the implications of these failed moments of closure, Reising elaborates on topics ranging from the roots of domestic violence and mass murder in early American religious texts to the pornographic imperative of mid-century nature writing, and from James's descent into naturalist and feminist fiction to *Dumbo*'s explosive projection of commercial, racial, and political agendas for postwar U. S. culture.

puritanism in young goodman brown: Deeper Splendor Robert P. Vande Kappelle, 2022-03-03 Life's ultimate adventure--its grandest game and greatest challenge--is the spiritual transformation of the self. According to Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, personality and spirituality are interrelated, spirituality flowing out of individuality. Noting that people differ in fundamental ways, even though they possess the same instincts to drive them from within, Jung discovered that preference, rather than instinct, upbringing, environment, or genetic conditioning, is central to personality. The task of spirituality, then, is not to help us achieve correct doctrine or attain saintly status, but rather to help us best understand our humanity. This endeavor drives *Deeper Splendor*, a study of spirituality and personality in modern literature. We focus on modern literature, rather than on theology, philosophy, psychology, or sociology, because, as this volume makes clear, one of the

best resources for studying transformative spirituality is great literature. The great power of literature is that it speaks of human action and thought, not in the dry, matter-of-fact terms of history, ethics, psychology, or some other science, but in ways that are lively, uplifting, and productive. Engaging with great literature is like beginning a love affair. Such encounters may appear daunting at first, but when you fall in love, you want to know everything about the object of your love, and every encounter leaves you wanting more. When literature enhances spirituality—as is true in the dozen or more selections examined in *Deeper Splendor*—each literary moment renders us more fully alive. Like its companion texts, *Wading in Water* and *Deep Splendor*, this volume is useful for individual or group study. Each chapter concludes with questions suitable for discussion or reflection.

puritanism in young goodman brown: *Rethinking Nathaniel Hawthorne and Nature* Steven Petersheim, 2020-02-14 A friend and associate of the Transcendentalists in Concord, Nathaniel Hawthorne has rarely been taken seriously as a writer interested in the natural world. This book seeks to redress this omission by elucidating the sense of environmentality that emanates from Hawthorne's romances and other writings. Hawthorne's sense of kinship with the natural world runs deep in his work, particularly when his fiction is examined alongside his voluminous notebooks. *Rethinking Nathaniel Hawthorne and Nature* also contributes to the growing scholarly work aiming to illuminate Hawthorne as a writer deeply engaged in the issues of his day, particularly involving the environment, rather than an author simply interested in reinterpreting colonial history. Today's readers stand to gain a rich new understanding of Hawthorne by reassessing Hawthorne's attitude toward the natural world.

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puritanism in young goodman brown: *Daily Life in Colonial New England* Claudia Durst Johnson, 2017-04-17 This book presents a unique perspective on life in Colonial England, exposing many misconceptions and depicting how elements of its culture that are typically regarded as marginal—such as the activities of pirates—actually had an extensive impact on the populace. The daily lives of most colonial New Englanders were much more colorful and exotic than the drab, pious picture many of us have in mind. *Daily Life in Colonial New England* exposes as myth much of what we might believe about this era and reveals surprising truths—for example, that sex was openly discussed in Colonial times and was regarded as a welcome necessity of married life, and that women had more legal and marital rights than they did in the 19th century. The book describes topics such as the legal and sexual rights of women, the extent of infant mortality; the lives of underclass citizens who formed the majority in New England, such as indentured servants, African slaves, debtors, and criminals; and the integral role that pirates played in business and employment during the Colonial period. Readers will gain deeper insight into what life during this period was like

through accounts of the real terror of being one of the accused in witch hunts and the sympathy that the general population had for dissidents who were questioned and arrested by the government. Primary materials that range from legal documents to sermons, letters, and diaries are used as sources that verify historical ideas and events.

puritanism in young goodman brown: A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne Lea Bertani Vozar Newman, 1979

puritanism in young goodman brown: *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* Nina Baym, 2019-01-24 This gracefully written book considers all of Nathaniel Hawthorne's works, from Fanshawe through the unfinished romances of his last years, and establishes the pattern of his literary development. Ms. Baym brings the crucial facts of Hawthorne's career into clear focus, and places the individual works within the total picture. Disputing some enduring critical pieties, she finds in Hawthorne a writer who experimented with a series of literary poses through which he tried both to discover himself and to please his audience. He realized late, she says, the paradox that the more he departed from conventional modes, the more popular his writing became. By looking discerningly at all of Hawthorne's work as it unfolded, Ms. Baym produces compelling new insights into a major American writer and adds appreciably to our understanding of him.

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puritanism in young goodman brown: Symposium on Puritanism and Society (JCR Vol. 06 No. 02) Gary North, Allen C. Guelzo, David H. Chilton, Richard Flinn, Rita Mancha, Edmund S. Morgan, James B. Jordan, Gordon Geddes, Greg L. Bahnsen, This volume is devoted to a study of the Puritans, the contributors survey the impact of Puritan sermons, thought, and law on society in general. There is little doubt today that the Puritan movement in England and the New World helped to reshape the basic institutions of the Anglo-Saxon world. In previous issues, we have surveyed the Puritan views concerning civil law, economics, science, and other kingdom institutions. Now we focus on those aspects of Puritan life that concerned the family, the institutional church, music, death, and Cromwell's Protectorate. Whatever politics you adopt, he says, should be liberal; whatever economics you adopt, of course, should be interventionist. Not impressed by biblical law. Dr. Lloyd-Jones falls back upon the conventional unconventionality of late-twentieth-century British politics—all in the name of liberal innovation. He ignores the fact that the dominion covenant was reestablished, after the Fall, with Noah. The Fall has now become an excuse for not doing anything to cure its effects. However, he said in his 1975 essay, Looking at history it seems to me that one of the greatest dangers confronting the Christian is to become a political conservative, and an

opponent of legitimate reform, and the legitimate rights of people (p. 103). But if explicitly Christian reform is doomed, what kind of legitimate reform does he have in mind? Why, Calvinist reform, meaning economic interventionism, since Arminianism supposedly leads to laissez-faire: Arminianism over-stresses liberty. It produced the laissez-faire view of economics, and it always introduces inequalities—some people becoming enormously wealthy, and others languishing in poverty and destitution (p. 106). Free enterprise creates inequality! If these conclusions seem preposterous to you, you will want to order the latest *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, which contains my article showing how free enterprise economics came to the Puritan colonies in the final years of the 17th century. You will want to read Gordon Geddes' essay on the Puritan view of death, Greg Bahnsen's defense of biblical law against Merideth Kline's attack, Rita Mancha's study of women in Calvinist thought, Richard Flinn's essay on the Puritan concept of the family, James Jordan's essay on Puritanism and music, and David Chilton's defense of Oliver Cromwell. *Puritanism and Society* will provide you with information which will enable you to decide whether Dr. Lloyd-Jones' assessment is correct, whether his view on 17th-century Puritanism's outlook is truly heretical. These three issues of *The Journal* have created considerable controversy. The idea that Puritanism was essentially a package deal—a comprehensive world-and-life outlook that affected all spheres of social life—has alienated numerous self-proclaimed neo-Puritans. This series has also driven another group to abandon the Puritan tradition, and to adopt a kind of neo-anabaptism to replace the older theonomic Puritan tradition. The reprinting neo-Puritans have faced a dual challenge: either adopt the theonomic tradition which was fundamental to the Puritan movement, or else abandon Puritanism's tradition in favor of new-anabaptism. Predictably, they wish to do neither. Yet to remain betwixt and between is to remain caught in a crossfire. The interesting product of this immobility has been a narrowing of focus: endless articles on the (beneficial) emotionalism of Puritanism, and a stream of biographical articles, primarily dealing with the less well-known later preachers who have defended predestination, but who had little or no lasting influence on Western culture, and who were not explicitly Puritan in their outlook.

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puritanism in young goodman brown: The Productive Tension of Hawthorne's Art Claudia Durst Johnson, 1981 In both his short fiction and major works, Nathaniel Hawthorne, like many romantics, is torn between the eighteenth-century view of an orderly, balanced, static art and universe, on the one hand, and the nineteenth-century conception of a changeful, various art on the other. Hawthorne based his social and psychological values on an organic view of the world, but the world of his art tended to be mechanistic. Johnson argues that Hawthorne found in theology the myths which became vehicles for his exploration of his art.

puritanism in young goodman brown: The Province of Piety Michael J. Colacurcio, 1995 In this celebrated analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Michael J. Colacurcio presents a view of the author as America's first significant intellectual historian. Colacurcio shows that Hawthorne's fiction responds to a wide range of sermons, pamphlets, and religious tracts and debates—a variety of moral discourses at large in the world of provincial New England. Informed by comprehensive historical

research, the author shows that Hawthorne was steeped in New England historiography, particularly the sermon literature of the seventeenth century. But, as Colacurcio shows, Hawthorne did not merely borrow from the historical texts he deliberately studied; rather, he is best understood as having written history. In *The Province of Piety*, originally published in 1984 (Harvard University Press), Hawthorne is seen as a moral historian working with fictional narratives--a writer brilliantly involved in examining the moral and political effects of Puritanism in America and recreating the emotional and cultural contexts in which earlier Americans had lived.

puritanism in young goodman brown: The Cambridge Introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne Leland S. Person, 2007-04-05 As the author of *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne has been established as a major writer of the nineteenth century and the most prominent chronicler of New England and its colonial history. This introductory book for students coming to Hawthorne for the first time outlines his life and writings in a clear and accessible style. Leland S. Person also explains some of the significant cultural and social movements that influenced Hawthorne's most important writings: Puritanism, Transcendentalism and Feminism. The major works, including *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*, as well as Hawthorne's important short stories and non-fiction, are analysed in detail. The book also includes a brief history and survey of Hawthorne scholarship, with special emphasis on recent studies. Students of nineteenth-century American literature will find this a rewarding and engaging introduction to this remarkable writer.

puritanism in young goodman brown: A History of American Puritan Literature Kristina Bross, Abram Van Engen, 2020-10-15 For generations, scholars have imagined American puritans as religious enthusiasts, fleeing persecution, finding refuge in Massachusetts, and founding 'America'. The puritans have been read as a product of New England and the origin of American exceptionalism. This History challenges the usual understanding of American puritans, offering new ways of reading their history and their literary culture. Together, an international team of authors make clear that puritan America cannot be thought of apart from Native America, and that its literature is also grounded in Britain, Europe, North America, the Caribbean, and networks that spanned the globe. Each chapter focuses on a single place, method, idea, or context to read familiar texts anew and to introduce forgotten or neglected voices and writings. *A History of American Puritan Literature* is a collaborative effort to create not a singular literary history, but a series of interlocked new histories of American puritan literature.

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