

PAL: Perspectives in American Literature - A Research and Reference Guide - An Ongoing Project

© [Paul P. Reuben](#)

(To send an email, please click on my name above.)

Chapter 3: Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)

Outside Links: | [Hawthorne in Salem](#) | [Eldritch Press's NH Page](#) | [Studies in *The House of the Seven Gables*](#) |

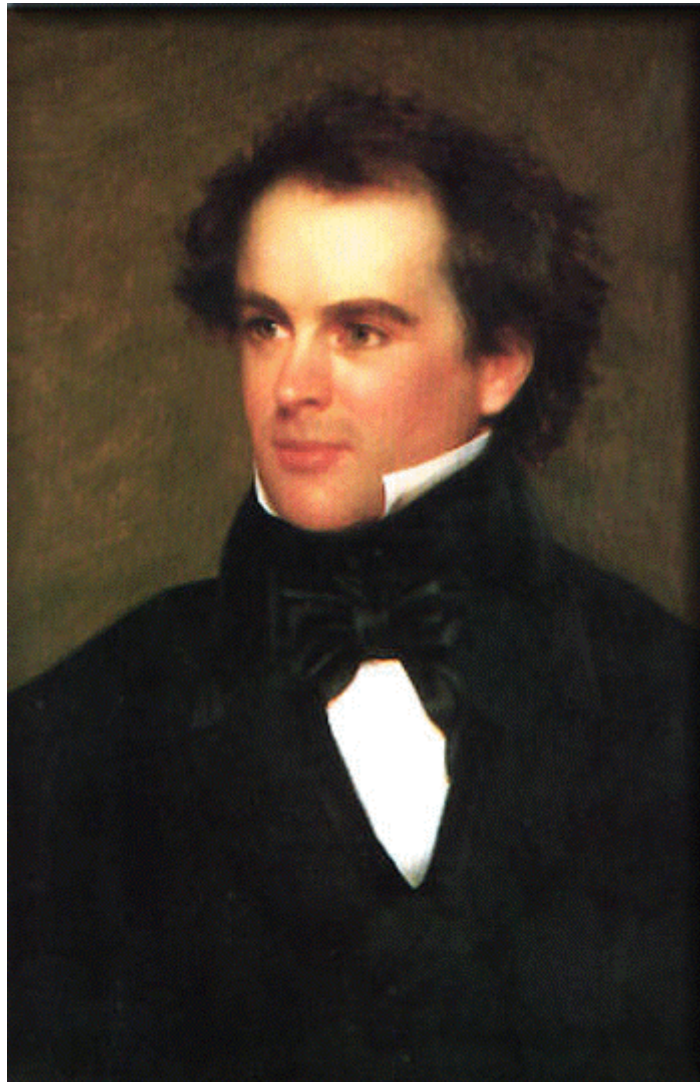
Page Links: | [Primary Works](#) | [Reasons for Hawthorne's Current Popularity](#) | [Major Themes in Hawthorne's Fiction](#) | [Influences on Hawthorne](#) | [Hawthorne as a Literary Artist](#) | [The Novel vs. the Romance](#) |

| Selected Bibliography: [Biographical 1980-1999](#) [Biographical 2000-Present](#) [Critical 1980-1999](#) [Critical 2000-Present](#) [The Scarlet Letter](#) [Sophia Peabody Hawthorne](#) [Studies in Hawthorne-Melville Friendship](#) |

| [Study Questions](#) | [MLA Style Citation of this Web Page](#) |

| [A Brief Biography](#) |

Site Links: | [Chap 3: Index](#) | [Alphabetical List](#) | [Table Of Contents](#) | [Home Page](#) | August 11, 2008 |



Source: [Peabody Essex Museum](#)

"America is now wholly given over to a d****d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash--and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of *The Lamplighter* (by Maria Susanna Cummins), and other books neither better nor worse? Worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the hundred thousand." - Hawthorne's 1855 letter to his publisher William D. Ticknor, quoted in Pattee, Fred L. *The Feminine Fifties*. NY: Appleton-Century Co., 1940. p. 110.

Primary Works

Twice-Told Tales, 1837; *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 1846; *The Scarlet Letter*, 1850; *The House of Seven Gables*, 1851; *The Blithedale Romance*, 1852; *The Life of Franklin Pierce*, 1852; *The Marble Faun*, 1860; *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Hawthorne*, 18 vols. ed. W. Charvat et al., 1962-1987.

Twenty Days with Julian & Little Bunny by Papa. Auster, Paul (introd.). NY: New York Review Books, 2003.

Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Documentary Volume. Franklin, Benjamin, V (ed. and introd.). Detroit: Gale, 2003.

Reasons for Hawthorne's Current Popularity

1. One of the most modern of writers, Hawthorne is relevant in theme and attitude. According to H. H. Waggoner, Hawthorne's attitudes use irony, ambiguity, and paradox.
2. Hawthorne rounds off the puritan cycle in American writing - belief in the existence of an active evil (the devil) and in a sense of determinism (the concept of predestination).
3. Hawthorne's use of psychological analysis (pre-Freudian) is of interest today.
4. In themes and style, Hawthorne's writings look ahead to Henry James, William Faulkner, and Robert Penn Warren.

Major Themes in Hawthorne's Fiction

1. Alienation - a character is in a state of isolation because of self-cause, or societal cause, or a combination of both. (See Appendix A for more discussion of Themes 1 & 2).
2. Initiation - involves the attempts of an alienated character to get rid of his isolated condition.
3. Problem of Guilt - a character's sense of guilt forced by the puritanical heritage or by society; also guilt vs. innocence.
4. Pride - Hawthorne treats pride as evil. He illustrates the following aspects of pride in various characters: physical pride (Robin), spiritual pride (Goodman Brown, Ethan Brand), and intellectual pride (Rappaccini).
5. Puritan New England - used as a background and setting in many tales.
6. Italian background - especially in *The Marble Faun*.
7. Allegory - Hawthorne's writing is allegorical, didactic and moralistic.
8. Other themes include individual vs. society, self-fulfillment vs. accommodation or frustration, hypocrisy vs. integrity, love vs. hate, exploitation vs. hurting, and fate vs. free will.

Influences on Hawthorne

1. Salem - early childhood, later work at the Custom House.
2. Puritan family background - one of his forefathers was Judge Hathorne, who presided over the Salem witchcraft trials, 1692.
3. Belief in the existence of the devil.
4. Belief in determinism.

Hawthorne as a Literary Artist

1. First professional writer - college educated, familiar with the great European writers, and influenced by puritan writers like Cotton Mather.
2. Hawthorne displayed a love for allegory and symbol. He dealt with tensions involving: light versus dark; warmth versus cold; faith versus doubt; heart versus mind; internal versus external worlds.
3. His writing is representative of 19th century, and, thus, in the mainstream due to his use of nature, its primitiveness, and as a source of inspiration; also in his use of the exotic, the gothic, and the antiquarian.

| [Top](#) | The Novel versus the Romance

According to Stanley Bank, Hawthorne may stand as the symbol of the 19thc. American author and his predicament. Europe could afford the luxury of romanticizing its past and finding its ideal in the pastoral. But America's past was too close. Yet America's literature was in need of tradition in which literature could flourish. Hawthorne struggled with the problem of relevance of the artist to the world and the meaning of art to America. The American Romanticists created a form that, at first glance, seems ancient and traditional; they borrowed from classical romance, adapted pastoral themes, and incorporated Gothic elements. Was there anything unique about the American shape of prose fiction, or was it merely an amalgam of long and fixed genres? It can be shown that romance, as practiced in America, was a departure from each of the genres, although related to them. Gilbert Highet, in *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* lists the main elements of classical romance: 1. separated lovers who remain true to each other, while the woman's chastity is preserved; 2. an intricate plot, including stories within stories; 3. exciting and unexpected chance events; 4. travel to faraway settings; 5. hidden and mistaken identity; and 6. written in an elaborate and elegant style. Classical romance, Highet noted, is "escape" literature; American romance brings the reader closer to truth, not further from it. The pastoral is a literary form in which happy country life is portrayed as a contrast to the complexity and anxiety of the urban society. Such a contrast may be seen in the American romancers' use of the frontier, Indian society, Arcadian communities, Puritan villages, and shipboard societies. Few of the characters are strictly outside the urban society to which they provide contrast. It is clearly related to Hawthorne's creation of "a theater, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagoric antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives," and to his calling for a "license with regard to everyday probability." But if the American romancer created arcadias, they are arcadias that invite criticism and redirected that criticism to the society in which the American romancers lived. Many gothicisms have been incorporated into American romances. Typical are the manuscript, the castle, the crime, religion, deformity, ghosts, magic, blood, etc. In the gothic novel these characteristics are used as the basis and end of a tale of terror. In the work of American romancers, they are used not as the object itself, but to serve the work.

"I have sometimes produced a singular and not unpleasing effect, so far as my own mind was concerned, by imagining a train of incidents in which the spirit and mechanism of the fairyland should be combined with the characters and manners of familiar life." - N. Hawthorne

"When a writer calls his work a romance, he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a novel." - N. Hawthorne

"The word 'romance' must signify, besides the more obvious qualities of the picturesque and the heroic, an assumed freedom from the ordinary novelistic requirements of verisimilitude, development and continuity; a tendency towards melodrama and idyll; a more or less formal abstractness and, on the other hand, a tendency to plunge into the underside of consciousness; a willingness to abandon moral questions or to ignore the spectacle of man in society, or to consider these things only indirectly or abstractly." - Richard Chase

(from Stanley Bank, ed. *American Romanticism: A Shape for Fiction*, 1969)

| [Top](#) | Selected Bibliography: Biographical 1980-1999

Herbert, T. Walter. *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-Class Family*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.

Hull, Raymona E. *Nathaniel Hawthorne, the English experience, 1853-1864*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1980. PS1884 .H8

Martin, Terence. *Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983. PS1888 .M34

Mellow, James R. *Nathaniel Hawthorne in his times*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980. PS1881 .M4

Miller, Edwin H. *Salem is my dwelling place: a life of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1991. PS1881 .M48

Mitchell, Thomas R. *Hawthorne's Fuller Mystery*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998.

Moore, Margaret B. *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1998.

Pahl, Dennis. *Architects of the abyss: the indeterminate fictions of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1989. PS377 .P34

Turner, Arlin. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*. NY: Oxford, 1980. PS1881 .T79

Von Frank, Albert J. *Critical essays on Hawthorne's short stories*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991. PS 1888 .V65

Wagenknecht, Edward. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: the man, his tales and romances*. NY: Continuum, 1989. PS1881 .W32

Selected Bibliography: Biographical 2000-Present

Davis, Clark. *Hawthorne's Shyness: Ethics, Politics, and the Question of Engagement*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005.

Maibor, Carolyn R. *Labor Pains: Emerson, Hawthorne, and Alcott on Work and the Woman Question*. NY: Routledge, 2004.

McFarland, Philip. *Hawthorne in Concord*. NY: Grove, 2004.

Wineapple, Brenda. *Hawthorne*. NY: Knopf, 2003.

| [Top](#) | Selected Bibliography: Critical 1980-1999

Alkana, Joseph. *The Social Self: Hawthorne, Howells, William James, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1997.

Auerbach, Jonathan. *The Romance Of Failure: First-Person Fictions Of Poe, Hawthorne, And James*. NY: Oxford UP, 1989. PS 374 .F24 A94

Babiiha, Thaddeo K. *The James-Hawthorne relation: bibliographical essays*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980. PS2124 .B3

Bell, Millicent. *New essays on Hawthorne's major tales*. NY: Cambridge UP, 1993. PS1888 .N39

Berlant, Lauren. *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.

Bunge, Nancy. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Study of the Short Fiction*. NY: Twayne, 1993.

Coale, Samuel C. *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American Romance*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1998.

Colacurcio, Michael J. *The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984. PS1892 .H5 C6

Dolis, John. *The Style of Hawthorne's Gaze: Regarding Subjectivity*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1993.

Dunne, Michael. *Hawthorne's Narrative Strategies*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995.

Easton, Alison. *The Making of the Hawthorne Subject*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1996.

Gable, Harvey L., Jr. *Liquid Fire: Transcendental Mysticism in the Romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. NY: Peter Lang, 1998.

Greenwald, Elissa. *Realism and the Romance: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, and American Fiction*. Ann Arbor: UM Research P, 1989. PS 374 .R37 G7

Harris, Kenneth M. *Hypocrisy and self-deception in Hawthorne's fiction*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1988. PS1892 .H94 H37

Johnson, Claudia D. *The productive tension of Hawthorne's art*. U of Alabama P, 1981. PS1888 .J6

Laffrado, Laura. *Hawthorne's Literature for Children*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1992.

Lloyd-Smith, A. G. *Eve Tempted: Writing and Sexuality in Hawthorne's Fiction*. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes, Noble, 1983, 1984. PS1892 .S47 L55

Millington, Richard H. *Practicing Romance: Narrative Form and Cultural Engagement in Hawthorne's Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992.

Moore, Thomas R. *A Thick and Darksome Veil: The Rhetoric of Hawthorne's Sketches, Prefaces, and Essays*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1994.

Pahl, Dennis. *Architects of the Abyss: The Indeterminate Fictions of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1989. PS377 .P34

Pennell, Melissa M. *Student Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999.

Pfister, Joel. *The Production of Personal Life: Class, Gender, and the Psychological in Hawthorne's Fiction*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991.

Schirmeister, Pamela. *The Consolations of Space: The Place of Romance in Hawthorne, Melville, and James*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990.

Stern, Milton R. *Contexts for Hawthorne: The Marble Faun and the Politics of Openness and Closure in American Literature*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991.

Thompson, G. R. *The Art of Authorial Presence: Hawthorne's Provincial Tales*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993.

| [Top](#) | Selected Bibliography: Critical 2000-Present

Bellis, Peter J. *Writing Revolution: Aesthetics and Politics in Hawthorne, Whitman, and Thoreau*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2003.

Clack, Randall A. *The Marriage of Heaven and Earth: Alchemical Regeneration in the Works of Taylor, Poe, Hawthorne, and Fuller*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000.

Davis, Clark. *Hawthorne's Shyness: Ethics, Politics, and the Question of Engagement*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005.

Dunne, Michael. *Calvinist Humor in American Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007.

Harrison, Les. *The Temple and the Forum: The American Museum and Cultural Authority in Hawthorne, Melville, Stowe,*

and Whitman. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2007.

Riss, Arthur. *Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Nineteenth-century American Literature*. NY: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Wright, Sarah B. *Critical Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. NY: Facts On File, 2007.

Selected Bibliography: *The Scarlet Letter*

Barlowe, Jamie. *The Scarlet Mob of Scribblers: Rereading Hester Prynne*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2000.

Baym, Nina. *The Scarlet Letter: A Reading*. Boston: Twayne, 1986. PS1868 .B39

Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The office of the Scarlet letter*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991. PS1868 .B395

Crain, Patricia. *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from The New England Primer to The Scarlet Letter*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000.

Gross, Seymour L. ed. *The scarlet letter: an authoritative text, essays in criticism and scholarship*. NY: Norton, 1988. PS1868 .A2 G76

Johnson, Claudia D. *Understanding The Scarlet Letter: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995.

Kesterson, David B. *Critical essays on Hawthorne's The scarlet letter*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988. PS1868 .C75

Larson, Charles R. *Arthur Dimmesdale*. NY: A & W. Publishers, 1983. PS3562 .A752 A88

Selected Bibliography: Sophia Peabody Hawthorne

Elbert, Monika M., Julie E. Hall, and Katharine Rodier. eds. *Reinventing the Peabody Sisters*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2006.

Herbert, T. Walter. *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle Class Family*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.

Hudock, Amy E., and Katharine Rodier. eds. *American Women Prose Writers, 1820-1870*. Detroit: Gale, 2001.

Marshall, Megan. *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

Valenti, Patricia D. *Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, A Life, 1: 1809-1847*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2004.

| [Top](#) | Studies in Hawthorne-Melville Friendship

Bell, Millicent. "Melville and Hawthorne at the Grave of St. John (A Debt to Pierre Bayle)." *Modern Language Notes*, 67 (1952), 116-118.

Canby, H. S. "Hawthorne and Melville." *Classic Americans: Eminent American Writers From Irving To Whitman*. 1931; rpt. NY: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1959.

Carpenter Frederic I. "Puritans Preferred Blondes: The Heroines of Melville [sic] and Hawthorne." *New England Quarterly*, 9 (1936), 253-272.

Curl, Vega. *Pasteboard Masks: Fact As Spiritual Symbol In The Novels Of Hawthorne And Melville*. 1931; rpt. Philadelphia: R. West, 1976.

Gross, Seymour L. "Hawthorne Versus Melville." *Bucknell Review*, 14 (1966), 89-109.

Hayford, Harrison. "Hawthorne, Melville, and the Sea." *New England Quarterly*, 19 (1946), 435-452.

Hoeltje, Hubert H. "Hawthorne, Melville, and 'Blackness.'" *American Literature*, 37 (1965), 41-51.

Kimmey, John L. "Pierre and Robin: Melville's Debt to Hawthorne." *Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 38 (1965), 90-92.

Levy, Leo B. "Hawthorne, Melville, and the Monitor." *American Literature*, 37 (1965), 33-40.

Lueders, Edward G. "The Melville-Hawthorne Relationshipian." *Western Humanities Review*, 4 (1950), 323-334. Maxwell, Desmond E. S. "The Tragic Phase: Melville and Hawthorne." *American Fiction: The Intellectual Background*. NY: Columbia Univ. P, 1963.

May, John R. "The Possibility of Renewal: The Ideal and Real in Hawthorne, Melville and Twain." *Toward A New Earth: Apocalypse In The American Novel*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame P, 1972. [42-91]

McCarthy, Paul. "The Extraordinary Man as Idealist in Novels by Hawthorne and Melville." *Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 54 (1969), 43-51. [Excellent!]

McCorquodale, Marjorie Kimball. "Melville's Pierre as Hawthorne ." *The U Of Texas Studies In English*, 33 (1954), 97-102. [How about ISABEL as Hawthorne?!!]

Miller, James E., Jr. "Hawthorne and Melville: No! in Thunder." *Quests Surd And Absurd: Essays In American Literature*. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago P, 1967. (186-208.)

Miller, James E., Jr. "Hawthorne and Melville: The Unpardonable Sin." *Publications Of The Modern Language Association Of America*, 70 (1955), 91-114.

Murray, Henry A., et al. *Melville & Hawthorne In The Berkshires: A Symposium*. Ed. Howard P. Vincent. Kent, Ohio: The Kent State Univ. P, 1968.

Sealts, Merton M, Jr. "Approaching Melville Through 'Hawthorne and His Mosses.'" *Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 28, Part 3 (1962), 12-15.

Seelye, John D. " 'Ungraspable Phantom': Reflections of Hawthorne in Pierre and The Confidence-Man." *Studies In The Novel*, 1, No. 4 (1969), 436-443.

Stewart, Randall. "Melville and Hawthorne." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 51 (1952), 436-446.

Stewart, Randall. "The Vision of Evil in Hawthorne and Melville." *The Tragic Vision And The Christian Faith*. Ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. NY: Association P, 1957.

Waggoner, Hyatt H. "Hawthorne and Melville Against the Reader With Their Abode." *Studies In The Novel*, 2, No. 4 (1970), 420-424.

Watson, Charles N., Jr. "The Estrangement of Hawthorne and Melville." *New England Quarterly*, 46 (1973), 380-402. [Excellent!!!!!!] *****

There are others, of course, but there is much good reading and ruminating to be found in these pages. And don't overlook the "Introductions" and "Notes" to be found in various editions of Melville's works...esp. Weaver's *The Shorter Novels Of Herman Melville*, and the Hendricks House editions of *Clarel*, *The Confidence-Man*, and *Moby-Dick*. (and, of course, the Northwestern-Newberry editions)

(Compiled by Robert Kilgore Jr)

| [Top](#) | Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864): A Brief Biography

A Student Project by David Noceti

A Mind Veiled in the Past

Though wielding a great command over the written word and the ability to create such deeply imaginative works as "Young Goodman Brown," and "Rappaccini's Daughter," Nathaniel Hawthorne left us surprisingly little in the way of literature. All that remains are four novels, three collections of tales and sketches, a juvenile romance, some unfinished fragments, and a quantity of miscellaneous prose. Much of Hawthorne's best known work seems to be wrapped in a shawl of darkness through which he analyses sin, evil, and a past history that he regretted being attached to.

In the spring of 1808, word of the death of Nathaniel Hawthorne's father, also named Nathaniel, reached the ears of little, four-year-old Nathaniel. Being a Salem captain, the senior Nathaniel had died of a fever at Surinam, during a voyage. From this point on, little Nathaniel would be raised in solitude with his bereaved mother, Elizabeth Clarke Manning, who was born in 1780. The two of them would rely upon each other for emotional comfort. Tales of his family, and legends from a dark past haunted Hawthorne throughout his life. His father, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sr., was born in 1775 in Salem. Among his ancestors were Major William Hathorne (c. 1606/7-1681), known for his persecution of Quakers, and John Hathorne (1641-1717), the son of Major William and Anna Hathorne and a magistrate of the Court of Oyer and Terminer who was the stern interrogator of the accused witches.

Between the years of 1821 and 1824, Hawthorne was educated at Bowdoin College in Maine. Two notable friendships that he made at the school were with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Franklin Pierce, who would go on to become the 14th president of the United States. It should be noted that although it may appear that Hawthorne only surrounded himself by intellectual equals, Lloyd Morris, in his book The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorn, notes that,

His associates were usually people who, from his own point of view, were his social inferiors. His preference was for the companionship of unpretentious, if not humble folk; possibly it furnished a compensation for his uneasy arrogance. His attitude toward people whom he considered his superiors in caste was resentful; he gratified the resentment by recording in his notebooks, with evident satisfaction, any adverse criticism made possible by their conduct. 48

After attending Bowdoin, Hawthorne worked as a writer and contributor to periodicals from 1825 to 1836. John L. O'Sullivan, a friend of Hawthorne's, published a magazine, the "Democratic Review," that would go on to print two dozen stories by Hawthorne. In spite of these minor successes, Hawthorne would fall victim to his own dark, introverted nature and set his first collection of short stories, "Seven Tales of My Native Land," ablaze after they were rejected by publishers.

His next attempt to break out of periodicals would be his first novel, Fanshawe, which he personally funded and published anonymously in 1828. It was based on his college life and did not receive much attention. Once again,

Hawthorne took the unsold copies and burned these as well. This jilted feeling would not leave Hawthorne. Fred L.

Pattee, in The Feminine Fifties, would cite this example of Hawthorne's bitterness in a letter to his publisher, William D. Ticknor in 1855: "America is now wholly given over to a d****d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash--and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of *The Lamplighter* (by Maria Susanna Cummins), and other books neither better nor worse? Worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the hundred thousand" (110).

Despite Hawthorne's own bitterness and pyrotechnics, his early attempts in writing garnered him a new friendship in publisher Samuel Goodrich. In 1836, Hawthorne edited the "American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge" in Boston, and compiled a book for children Peter Parley's Universal History, in 1837. This was followed by even more children's books, Grandfather's Chair (1841), Famous Old People (1841), Liberty Tree (1841), and Biographical Stories for Children (1842).

| [Top](#) | Hawthorne continued to make friends with influential men in American history. In 1842 he befriended Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, two important thinkers in the Transcendentalist movement in the United States. This led to his meeting of Sophia Peabody, who was active in the Transcendentalist movement, and whom Hawthorne married that same year. Some have noted the marriage as being a happy one, others, as a failure, either way they ended up having three children and lived a rich life together in Salem, Concord, and over seas. They settled in Concord and their growing family soon acquired debts that drove them to return to Salem. Hawthorne's way with words was not enough to earn him a living as a writer. In 1846 he took the job of surveyor of the Port of Salem. Three years later he was fired.

With the Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne did what few other American writers had done up until that point, explore the hidden motivations of his characters. In a prefatory to The Scarlet Letter, "The Custom-House," Hawthorne delved into the dark past of his family and of Puritan Salem. In it he claims that the manuscript was found in the Federal Custom House, in Salem, Massachusetts, where he worked for a short time. His portrayal of Puritans obsessed with sin and intolerance appeared in 1850 and has since been criticized as depicting Puritans as being harsher than they were. Such criticisms seem to fall by the wayside when taken in light of Hawthorne's own family history, and the publication of The House of the Seven Gables (1851). The motivation for the story comes from the legend of a curse placed on Hawthorne's own family by one of the women condemned to death during the Salem witch trials, of which Nathaniel's grandfather, James Hathorne, was a judge. You might note the difference between the spellings of the two last names; Nathaniel added a 'w' to his name to further distance himself from the dark past of his family. In the novel, the curse is played out in the novel through the decay of a mansion with seven gables. Not until the descendant of the killed

woman marries a young niece of the family does the decay cease, implying that only through and acknowledgement of the past, whether he was a part of it or not, can those connected to the witch trials hope to find solace.

"The Custom House" also sets out to define Hawthorne's idea of the romance. Today we would use this definition to refer to a novel. A recent scholar has labeled the definition set forth by Hawthorne as "open-ended allegory." Cushin and Newlin tout Hawthorne as being "America's first great symbolist writer" and that he "blurs the lines between allegory and conventional symbolism, and points in the direction of twentieth-century fiction with its wide-ranging symbolism and concerns with human psychology" (131). In spite of such influential accomplishments, A. N. Kaul notes that "What may surprise us more is the fact that so few creative writers have turned to him apart from his own countrymen—or, if others have in fact turned to him, that they have left so few reports of their discoveries" (3). Morris tells us that Hawthorne had this to say about his own writing:

| [Top](#) | Sometimes my ideas were like precious stones under the earth, requiring toil to dig them up, and care to polish and brighten them; but often a delicious stream of thought would gush out on the page at once, like water sparkling up suddenly in the desert; and when it had passed, I gnawed my pen hopelessly, or blundered on with cold and miserable toil, as if there were a wall of ice between me and my subject. 54

Morris then tells of how Hawthorne would often leave his room when darkness came, much as his Young Goodman Brown did, and "wander about in the open air," and that "after having dreamed for so many hours among fantasies he saw the real world as a fantasy also, a thing of shadows and indefinite masses, opaque and imperceptible" (54).

The Blithedale Romance (1852), an analysis of the flaws within the concept of a Utopia, seems to be based on Hawthorne's earlier stay in the Brook Farm Commune, in West Roxbury. Some speculate that the doomed heroine is, in fact, the transcendentalist Margaret Fuller. It was during this time that Hawthorne befriended Herman Melville, author of Moby Dick, which is dedicated to Hawthorne.

The next year, Hawthorne's old friend from school, Franklin Pierce, was elected into office. Seeking to help his friend, President Pierce appointed Hawthorne, who also wrote Pierce's biography, to be his consul in Liverpool, England. He lived in England for four years and then spent a year and a half in Italy where he wrote The Marble Faun (1860), which is set in Italy. It explored the conflict between innocence and guilt. This would be Hawthorne's last novel. In his home in Concord, which he called The Wayside, he wrote the essays found in Our Old Home (1863). Nathaniel Hawthorne died on May 19th, 1864 at the age of sixty. His wife would later edit and publish his notebooks. These have now been restored to their original form, replacing those things that she either removed or changed. His son, Julian, would be convicted of defrauding the public in 1912.

Hawthorne carries on in numerous critical texts and biographies on both his works and life, as well as commanding a strong web presence. There is a Nathaniel Hawthorne Society, and his stories continue to be viewed as groundbreaking and influential, being taught throughout schools as a great American writer. Museums containing important Hawthorne collections are, The Peabody Essex Museum, the House of the Seven Gables Historic Site, and the Salem Maritime National Historic Site, all located in Salem, Massachusetts. Modern interpretations of good and evil, the motivations that lead to unspeakable acts, and the creation of modern societies antihero seem to fit well with what Hawthorne's imagination was creating one-hundred-and-fifty years ago. The only regrets that we might have about Hawthorne would have to come from the fact that, compared to the amount of time that he dedicated to writing, he produced so little.

Works Cited

Arvin, Newton. Hawthorne. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961.

Cantwell, Robert. Nathaniel Hawthorne: The American Years. New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc, 1948.

Hall, Lawrence Sargent. Hawthorne: Critic of Society. Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1966.

Hawthorne: A collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Kaul, A. N. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966.

Morris, Lloyd. The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927.

Nation of Letters. Ed. Cushman, Stephen and Newlin, Paul. New York: Brandywine Press, 1998.

Study Questions

1. Explicate character, theme, language patterns, style, use of point of view, setting, or design in any particular short story or in *The Scarlet Letter*.
2. Explain what Melville means by Hawthorne's "blackness" in his essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses" and discuss it with specific references to any two of the stories in the text (or any three, or with reference to specific characters in *The Scarlet Letter*).
3. Explore the moral ambiguity in any given Hawthorne character or work. What does reading "Rappaccini's Daughter" (or "The Minister's Black Veil" or "Young Goodman Brown") do to the reader's ability to discern "good" and "evil" characters?
4. Consider Hawthorne's presentation of women in his fiction. What attitudes inform his portraits of Beatrice Rappaccini, or of Hester Prynne?
5. Consider the relationship between "The Custom-House" and *The Scarlet Letter*. Where does the narrator stand in each work? In what ways might we consider "The Custom-House" an integral part of the longer fiction? Consider the particular use of "The Custom-House" as a way of "explaining" or delaying the fiction: might "The Custom-House" serve as Hawthorne's "black veil" in facing his readers?
6. Given the autobiographical references in "The Custom-House," consider the possibility that each of the major characters in *The Scarlet Letter* might also be aspects of the narrator's own persona. Discuss ways in which Hester

Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, and Pearl complement each other thematically.

7. Given your earlier study of Puritan literature, trace elements of Puritanism in Hawthorne's stories or *The Scarlet Letter* and discuss the extent to which Hawthorne himself embraces or critiques Puritan ideology. (Compare actual Puritans you have studied with Hawthorne's fictional characters: Anne Bradstreet with Hester Prynne; Edward Taylor with Arthur Dimmesdale; Jonathan Edwards with various ministers in Hawthorne, or with the narrator himself.)

8. Locate references to childhood in *The Scarlet Letter* and, focusing on Pearl, discuss Hawthorne's portrait of what it might have been like to be a Puritan child.

9. "Certain pervasive themes recur in Hawthorne's stories. These include: the individual's isolation from the community; the influence of the past on the present; the consequence of sin and guilt; the process of initiation; the limitations of self-reliance; the evil of manipulation." Select one of these themes as a means of interpreting any one of Hawthorne's stories discussed in class.

10. Discuss Hawthorne's definition of Romanticism and its expression in his work.

MLA Style Citation of this Web Page:

Reuben, Paul P. "Chapter 3: Nineteenth Century to 1865 - Nathaniel Hawthorne." *PAL: Perspectives in American Literature- A Research and Reference Guide*. WWW URL:

<http://web.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap3/hawthorne.html> (provide page date or date of your login).

| [Top](#) |