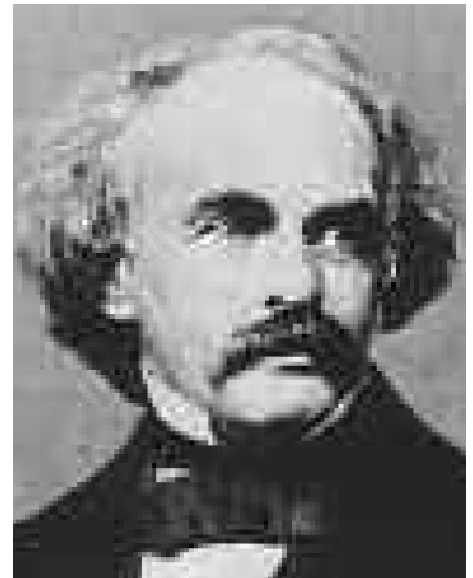


Nathaniel Hawthorne: Peaceable & Inspiring

By Tijana Salaj



A 19th Century American author, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote the Gothic romance *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850, a novel that achieved much critical acclaim. Hawthorne set many of his works in New England, specifically in a Puritanical 17th century town. The novel deals with psychological exploration of such themes as sin, repentance, and morality, with his previously written short story "The Custom House" forming the prologue. Three other major Romantic novels—*The House of Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *The Marble Faun* (1860)—round out his fiction output.

During the part of his life lived in Concord, Massachusetts, Hawthorne befriended many of New England's finest intellectuals including Amos Bronson Alcott and his daughter Louisa May Alcott, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. After meeting President Abraham Lincoln in Washington D.C. and touring battlefields, Hawthorne then wrote the essay "Chiefly About War Matters," under the pen name A Peaceable Man and published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1862.

Because of his works, Hawthorne became one of the leading writers of his time, one who explored ideas of individual responsibility, the importance of creative expression and man's relationship to the natural world. In addition, he wrote many stories about the mysterious and the disturbing.

Hawthorne read the works of others as well, enjoying especially the short stories of James Fenimore Cooper and Sir Walter Scott. Many of his own short stories however were not so well-received, at least at first. Nonetheless, whether it be Prynne's indomitable spirit, the moral dilemma of "Young Goodman Brown" (1835), the disastrous side of vanity in "The Birth Mark" (1843) or "Ethan Brand's Unpardonable Sin," (1850), many of Hawthorne's works gained popularity over the years and so that today they live on, inspiring numerous other authors' works as well adaptations to film.

Born on July 4, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts, Hawthorne was the son of Elizabeth Clarke Manning and Nathaniel Hathorne (without the "w"), a captain in the U.S. Navy who died when Nathaniel was four years old. William Hathorne, the author's great-great-grandfather, a Puritan, was the first of the family to emigrate from England, initially settling in Dorchester, Massachusetts before moving to Salem. There he became an important member of the Massachusetts Bay Colony where he held many political positions including magistrate and judge. He in fact became quite infamous for his consistently harsh sentencing.

William's son and the author's great-great-grandfather, John Hathorne, was one of the judges who oversaw the Salem Witch Trials. Having learned about this, Nathaniel may have then added the "w" to his surname in his early

twenties, shortly after graduating from Bowdoin College, in an effort to dissociate himself from his notorious forebears. The Salem Witch Trials however provided a theme for many of his stories including his most famous *The House of Seven Gables*.

Hawthorne attended Bowdoin along with poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future American President Franklin Pierce, of whom he wrote a biography in 1852. Hawthorne himself however was not interested in entering any of the traditional professions, concentrating instead on writing short stories, many of which were soon published in leading magazines. His first novel *Fanshawe* was published anonymously in 1828 and some years later his collection of short stories *Twice Told Tales* was published in 1837. Writing was not a profitable pursuit however, so Hawthorne worked at the Salem Custom-House for a while to augment his income. He also lived at the experimental transcendentalist community "Brook Farm," but stayed only a year.

In Boston on July 9, 1842, Hawthorne married painter and fellow transcendentalist Sophia Peabody with whom he would have three children: daughters Una (1844-1877) and Rose (1851-1926) and future author Julian Hawthorne (1846-1934). Hawthorne's adolescent humor was on display when he wrote to his sister Louisa with the news of becoming a father to Julian. "A small troglodyte made his appearance here at ten minutes to six o'clock this

morning," he enthused. "(It) claimed to be your nephew." Soon after, the Hawthorne and his young family settled in Concord, Massachusetts, in the heart of transcendentalist territory, living in a house known as "The Old Manse," Scottish for "mansion." Hawthorne's collection of short stories *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846) soon followed.

In 1851, Herman Melville dedicated *Moby Dick* to Hawthorne. In 1852 Hawthorne bought a home called "The Wayside" where the Alcott family had once lived. There he created *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and the re-telling of ancient Greek Myths in *Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys* (1853). The same year, with Franklin

Pierce's election as President, the Hawthorne family set sail for Liverpool, England where Nathaniel had been appointed to serve as U.S. Consul. During this period, they traveled throughout Europe, living for a time in France and Italy where they met fellow authors Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her husband Robert Browning. While in Italy, Hawthorne wrote *The Marble Faun* (1860).

Back home at "The Wayside," Hawthorne continued to write of his travels in *Passages from Notebooks. Our Old Home* (1863) was his last publication, a year before his death. Nathaniel Hawthorne died on May 19, 1864. Franklin Pierce, James Russell Lowell,

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes were among the many who mourned the loss of their beloved friend who lies buried on Author's Ridge in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts, resting peacefully among such eternal friends as the Alcott family, Emerson and Thoreau.

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