

Fall 2017

Nathaniel Hawthorne(1804-1864)

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts. He spent time in Boston, but much of his life until 1850 he spent in Salem. Moreover, the events of 1692 in Salem haunted him, especially as his great-grandfather was a judge in the witchcraft trials.

Hawthorne was drawn to writing at an early age. In his youth he published *The Spectator*, a newspaper which he distributed to family members from August to September of 1820. His wit was in evidence in the essays, poems, news, and advertisements in *The Spectator*. For the rest of his prolific writing life, Hawthorne published over 100 short stories, sketches, novels, children's stories, novels, and non-fiction pieces. In his later years Hawthorne felt his muse was on the wane, but he continued to write, producing works such as "Septimius Felton," an unfinished romance.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote the Gothic Romance *The Scarlet Letter* (1850); and like many of Hawthorne's works, the setting is New England and protagonist Hester Prynne's adultery in a Puritanical 17th century town provides the backdrop for a psychological exploration of the themes of sin, repentance, and morality. *The Scarlet Letter* achieved much critical acclaim for Hawthorne. His previously written short story "The Custom House" forms the prologue. His body of work contains three other major Romantic novels; *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *The Marble Faun* (1860).

Hawthorne became one of the leading writers of his time, moving away from formalism and exploring the ideas of individual responsibility, the importance of creative expression and man's relationship to the natural world.

Hawthorne's last home was at the Wayside in Concord. He was in failing health in his final years. He died in his sleep on May 18, 1864 while being with president Franklin Pierce.