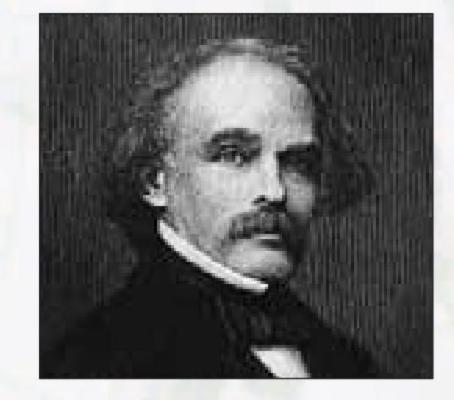


The Minister's Black Veil

Meet **Nathaniel** Hawthorne

"I don't want to be a doctor, and live by men's diseases; nor a minister to live by their sins; nor a lawyer to live by their quarrels. So I don't see there's anything left for me but to be an author."



—Hawthorne

Thus, some may say, Nathaniel Hawthorne became one of the United States' great writers by default.

Hawthorne was born in the port town of Salem, Massachusetts. When Hawthorne was only four, his father, a sea captain, died of yellow fever in South America. Raised by his eccentric, reclusive mother, young Hawthorne became an avid reader of poetry and exotic adventure stories.

At age seventeen Hawthorne began his four years at Bowdoin College in Maine. His friends there included a future president and a future poet: Franklin Pierce and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

After graduating from Bowdoin, Hawthorne sought seclusion in Salem, where he spent twelve years studying Puritan history and developing his writing skills. Out of those twelve years came two books, a novel called Fanshawe and a collection of short stories called Twice-Told Tales. Fanshawe was never popular—Hawthorne himself destroyed all the copies he could find—but reviewers praised Twice-Told Tales, and the book enjoyed a modest success with the public.

In his writing, Hawthorne explored issues of moral and social responsibility in Puritan New England. He hated intolerance, hypocrisy, and any other sentiment that separated one from the rest of humanity. Hawthorne explored these issues in tales he called "allegories of the heart"—stories that teach a moral principle.

In fact, Hawthorne's own deep family roots in Puritan Salem haunted the writer throughout his life. Hawthorne's ancestors included a man who had persecuted Quakers and one of the judges who had condemned the Salem "witches" in 1692. Hawthorne himself was keenly aware of issues of sin and guilt.

At the age of thirty-eight, Hawthorne married Sophia

Peabody and moved to the Old Manse, the house in Concord, Massachusetts, where writer Ralph Waldo Emerson had lived. However, unable to support his family as a writer, Hawthorne returned to Salem. There he served as Surveyor of the Port but lost the job when the political administration changed. Hawthorne then began writing The Scarlet Letter. This novel, published when Hawthorne was forty-six, was a sensation. He followed up the success with another novel, The House of the Seven Gables.

In 1853, when his friend Franklin Pierce became president of the United States, Hawthorne was awarded the position of U.S. consul to the city of Liverpool, England. He held that position for four years. Then he toured Italy and returned to England to write his last complete novel, The Marble Faun. By 1860, he returned to the United States—in ill health, struggling to continue writing, and despondent. Four years later, while traveling with Franklin Pierce, Hawthorne died in his sleep.

"Mr. Hawthorne's distinctive trait is invention, creation, imagination."

—Edgar Allan Poe

What other dungeon is so dark as one's own heart! What jailer so inexorable as one's self!"

—Hawthorne

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in 1804 and died in 1864.

