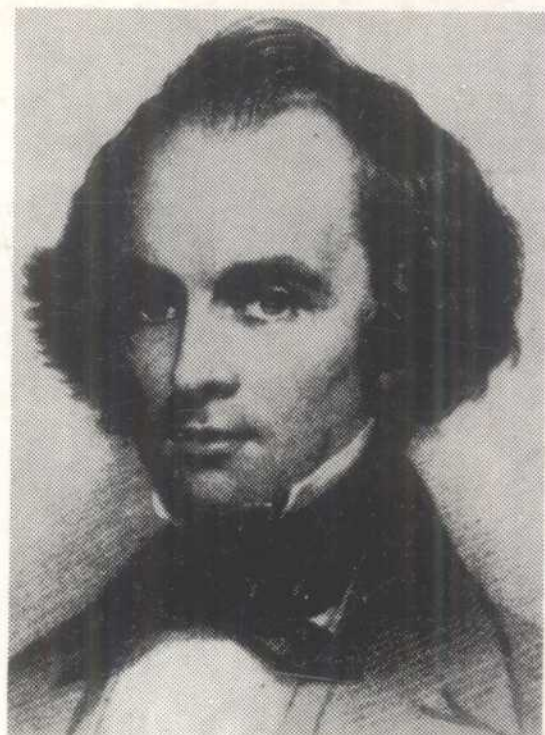


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short stories from one of  
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American literature



# SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF

# Nathaniel Hawthorne

**E**edited with an  
Introduction by

**ALFRED KAZIN**

**FAWCETT  
PREMIER**

30012-9 (Canada \$6.99) U.S. \$5.99

SELECTED  
SHORT STORIES  
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NATHANIEL  
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**A Fawcett Premier Book**

**Published by The Ballantine Publishing Group**

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**<http://www.randomhouse.com>**

**ISBN 0-449-30012-9**

**Printed in Canada**

**First Fawcett Premier Edition: December 1966**

**First Ballantine Books Edition: April 1983**

**35 34 33 32 31 30**

**NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE** was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on the 4th of July, 1804. His father was a sea captain who died when the boy was four; his mother became an eccentric recluse for the rest of her life. The Hawthornes were of old Puritan stock—a Judge Hathorne (as the name was originally spelled) had been a judge at the Salem witchcraft trials. Hawthorne's imaginative life was profoundly influenced by his image of this ancestor, who was to appear as the accursed founder of *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Hawthorne's second novel.

After graduating in 1825 from Bowdoin College in Maine, Hawthorne returned to Salem and lived in solitude while writing the historical tales and allegorical sketches that were to appear in *Twice-Told Tales* (1837). He earned an uncertain living at editing and hack writing, and was employed in the Boston Custom House (1839-1841). He married Sophia Peabody in 1842. On being discharged from the Custom House for political reasons, Hawthorne was able to write his first (and most famous) novel, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). This was followed by *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), in which he used his earlier experiences as a disaffected colonist at Brook Farm, and several collections of stories. As a reward for writing a campaign biography of his college friend Franklin Pierce, Hawthorne was appointed consul at Liverpool (1853-1857), then spent two years in Italy, where he gathered the material that went into his last finished novel, *The Marble Faun* (1860). His last years were marked by an extraordinary sudden decline of his creative powers. While on a tour in New Hampshire with ex-President Pierce, he died in an inn in Plymouth, New Hampshire, on May 19, 1864.

# **HAWTHORNE'S MAJOR WORKS**

## **NOVELS**

*Fanshawe*, 1828

*The Scarlet Letter*, 1850

*The House of the Seven Gables*, 1851

*The Blithedale Romance*, 1852

*The Marble Faun*, 1860

*Septimius Felton*, 1872

## **SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS**

*Twice-Told Tales*, 1837, 1842

*Grandfather's Chair*, 1841

*Famous Old People*, 1841

*Mosses from an Old Manse*, 1846

*The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales*, 1852

*A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*, 1852

*Tanglewood Tales*, 1853

## **ESSAYS**

*Our Old Home*, 1863

## **JOURNALS**

*American Notebooks*, 1868

*English Notebooks*, 1870

*French and Italian Notebooks*, 1871

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# INTRODUCTION

## The Artist of New England

**N**ATHANIEL HAWTHORNE died in 1864, in the midst of the Civil War—a social revolution that he profoundly distrusted. He was traveling in New Hampshire for his health with his old college friend, Franklin Pierce, whose Presidency of the United States (1853–1857) had been a failure because of his personal weakness and his attempts to compromise with the South, to head off the coming struggle. Hawthorne had also felt himself to be a failure. His sudden death in a New Hampshire inn ended his struggle to climb out of the despondency and creative frustration of his last years, when he was unable to complete any of his projects. He had always felt that to be a “mere storyteller” in New England demanded too much of his imaginative will. Despite a fair success with his first novels, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), he had never been able to assure an income by writing fiction, he had never felt sure of any public for it, and at the end no longer felt in command of his peculiar, delicate, hard-won gift. After the Civil War was over a new, brazenly materialistic society came into being, and Hawthorne ceased to be an example—if indeed he had ever been one—to writers of fiction; he was from now on to be a school classic, one of the New England worthies to people who for patriotic or didactic reasons liked to celebrate New England. He had become another name in the New England Temple, like Emerson, who had never been able to read him (or any other novelist), and whose own theories Hawthorne thought charming moonshine.

As one consequence of the Civil War that Hawthorne had so deeply—and for a New England writer so uniquely—distrusted, a professional kind of critical realism became the style and for the first time made “European” realism possible in this country. Between the late 1860’s, when Henry James and William Dean Howells, meeting in Boston through the



*Atlantic Monthly*, began to foster this kind of realism, and the 1920's, when its boldest examples appeared, this new awareness—that the literary imagination now had a subject in “society” alone—operated to create the American novel as the work of a single school. No longer was fiction a hypothesis, by a few original spirits, that “romance” had its rights in a culture dominated by religious literalism. Isolation had been Hawthorne's personal burden and his great theme. Isolation was to wreck the once-promising career of Hawthorne's passionate admirer, Herman Melville, who had appealed to Hawthorne to recognize a bond between them as creative spirits, to save him from the doom he expected. The gifted but insanely proud Poe, the most tragic figure in this triad of romantic genius, had rated American writers as if he were looking down on them from another planet.

Howells and James and Mark Twain were to feel a common recognition of opportunities: the object of the American novel must be the depiction of typical manners in a society that was producing recognizable social types. The surface of society had become a major source of interest to the novelist; Howells in the Albany depot and James on shipboard “studying” fellow passengers felt, as Hawthorne certainly had not, that the writing of fiction was a pleasant profession. Real life lay all about the novelist, waiting to be taken up. Hawthorne had felt “chilled and benumbed” as a storyteller in rigid old Salem. The son of a shipmaster who had died at sea and of a mother who always wore black and kept to her room, the young Hawthorne, after graduating from Bowdoin in 1825, had taken up solitude as necessary to his profession—but was so eager to see a human face that he rushed out to every fire. After scratching out a living by hackwork—his average remuneration for his stories in the magazines came to \$8.33—he became (thanks to his connections with Franklin Pierce's Democratic Party) a collector in the Salem customs house, and he had to be discharged from *this* before he could feel idle enough to start his masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*. Not until *The Scarlet Letter*, indeed, would Hawthorne take as real the public for whom he wrote.

Hawthorne seemed unrelated to the powerful instinct of critical realism that came after his death. The condescension that breathes out of Henry James's brilliant little book on Hawthorne (1879) marks the inevitable rejection of the bare, provincial, narrow New England scene by the modern novelist excited by the possibilities of social contrast and international

comedy. Yet when we remember how little novelists since James have made of Hawthorne as a possible ancestor,\* we realize that James, a brilliant critic who was always interested in any good novelist as a case to be studied, was still more interested in Hawthorne than later novelists were to be. Yet when we go back to Melville's raptures over Hawthorne's stories in the essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses," back to the tumultuously eloquent letters that Melville, in the throes of *Moby-Dick*, was writing from Pittsfield to Hawthorne six miles away in Lenox—when we compare *these* with James's entire detachment toward Hawthorne—we see what a change came over the American novelist after Hawthorne's death. In his creative loneliness Melville acclaims Hawthorne as a kind of savior. Because Hawthorne lives, Melville feels that his own struggles may not be in vain. Hawthorne is *the* American romancer, says Melville—a hero by his undismayed explorations of deep inward reality. In this lonely waste where American writers must live, says Melville, he feels like a "shepherd king—lord of a little vale in the solitary Crimea." But by his presence Hawthorne has given him, Melville, "the crown of India." Hawthorne is a proof of the divinity that artists share. "Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? . . . I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces."

This solitude—from which Hawthorne could not save Melville any more than he could save himself, but which Melville elevated into the myth of Hawthorne the master of men's souls—was to James the nemesis of literature. "The best things come, as a general thing, from the talents that are members of a group; every man works better when he has his companions working in the same line, and yielding the stimulus of suggestion, comparison, emulation." James's typical terms for the New England scene, both in his book on Hawthorne and in such "New England" novels as *The Europeans* and *The Bostonians*, emphasize the "blankness," "thinness," and "nudity" of the scene. To these James felt superior. Hawthorne was associated with frustration and cultural starvation. And since James was certainly more in-

\* Least of all in New England. But there are obvious parallels to Hawthorne in the South, notably Faulkner, whose profound regionalism includes the ancestral force of the same strong Calvinist conscience.

terested in Hawthorne than later novelists were to be, it is no wonder that in modern Hawthorne criticism the novelists are never heard from.

Hawthorne's fiction went out of style; it made no mark on the interesting new writers coming up; it ceased to affect the general literary public. Hawthorne became a presence in our literature rather than an influence on many minds. Twentieth-century American writers do not generally feel much relation to Hawthorne. To those who value past writers because they influence our living and thinking *now*, Hawthorne is more unreal than not. Those who create literature in our day have never been touched by Hawthorne as they have been by Melville, Thoreau, and even Emerson. In 1916, when James died, T. S. Eliot acutely noted the "Hawthorne aspect" in James's later books, *The Golden Bowl* and *The Sense of the Past*. Then casually, as a matter of New England kinship, Eliot paid homage to the depth of moral atmosphere in which Hawthorne's characters are steeped. In his remarkable play *The Old Glory*, the poet Robert Lowell has woven together situations from Hawthorne's "Endicott and the Red Cross," "The Maypole of Merry Mount," and "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." It is significant that both Eliot and Lowell are poets deeply concerned with New England themes and stirred by its religious absolutism. Lowell in *The Old Glory* very freely "modernizes" the rather stiff personages in Hawthorne's stories of the first Puritan settlements but makes fewer changes in adapting Melville's *Benito Cereno* to the stage. His use of "Endicott and the Red Cross" and "The Maypole of Merry Mount" is in striking contrast with the pageantlike formality of Hawthorne's own creation. Taking it all in all, it can be said that if literature embodies the consciousness of a generation, Hawthorne is not part of our generation.

Yet at the same time Hawthorne exists for us if not *in* us—he exists as Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell do not. We may not be as affected by any single passage in Hawthorne as we are by so many in Melville; we do not even get exasperated with Hawthorne as we do with Melville or Poe. There is a subtlety about Hawthorne's mind, an elegance of perception, that tantalizes our intellectual curiosity and perhaps is as ungraspable as those figures and odd details of design in Gothic cathedrals, those knotted images in Elizabethan plays, that are so much the style of *another* period that we cannot assimilate, however cleverly we explain them. There are

writers, far more removed from us in time, who reach us more directly than Hawthorne does. He is one of those classics whose meaning for our time—above all, his meaning to modern literature—has yet to be established. This is why there are so many theological and psychoanalytical interpretations of Hawthorne—they fill the vacuum created by our modern uncertainty about the use and relevance of Hawthorne's art.

Yet with all this, one curious fact stands out. A century after his death Hawthorne is still the most interesting artist in fiction whom New England has produced—he is the only New England artist in fiction whose works constitute a profound imaginative world of their own, the only one who represents more than some phase of New England history. After all that "realism" claimed—and achieved—for the American novel, it is striking how little it has done for New England. Hawthorne's works constitute a unique, imaginative world when compared with those of New England novelists from Harriet Beecher Stowe to J. P. Marquand; his "tales" and "romances" of New England have a depth of interest that we do not find in representations of the fixity and eccentricity of the New England character like *The Minister's Wooing*, *The Bostonians*, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*.

New England itself has not produced one true master in fiction except Hawthorne. Even as a subject for fiction, by New Yorkers like Henry James and Edith Wharton or foreigners like George Santayana, the "matter of New England" has usually resulted in a self-limiting social comedy. For the New England character is a fixed quantity in everybody's mind, not least in the New England mind itself, which sometimes seems prouder of its consistency through three centuries than of anything else. Realistic fiction sees the New England scene and the New England character as the same material. What we usually get in fiction laid in New England is a comedy that presupposes *our* detachment—New England as anachronism. If one were to review the character of New England in our fiction generally, it would entail a list of clichés about the rock-ribbed coast, sterling independence, unyieldingness, the flintiness of its merchants, and the unworldliness of its ministers. Fixed types appear in New England fiction as regularly as the cuckold in French farce. They recall the harsh Puritans whose procession opens *The Scarlet Letter*, the eccentric old maid Hepzibah Pyncheon in *The House of the Seven Gables*, the bustling old maid who ap-

pears briefly on board the *Pequod* in *Moby-Dick*, the hysterical feminist in *The Bostonians*, the hard-fisted Yankee farmer in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, the quaint fisher people in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, the cold New Englanders in *Ethan Frome*, the dried-up New Englanders in *The Last Puritan*, the eccentric Yankees in *The Wapshot Chronicle*. There are no celebrated novels named *Chicago* or *The New Yorkers*, but we have *The Bostonians*, *Boston*, *Boston Adventure*, *A Connecticut Yankee*, *The Last Puritan*, and how many others to prove that if a Yankee is in your book, the title will tell the reader more than half of what he expects anyway.

Now Hawthorne certainly used many of these stock touches when, to speak here only of his "tales," he described the upright, stolid Puritans in "Endicott and the Red Cross," New England eccentricity in "Wakefield" (the story of a man who left home forever to live in a neighboring street), or the New England hardness that was leveled against the hero of "The Artist of the Beautiful." His best tales often start from what one must call the New England situation—only in New England would a minister walk about with a black veil over his face, or young Goodman Brown, newly married, leave his bride, Faith, to consort with the Devil in the woods. It is such *symbols* that are always the *mise-en-scène*, the matter in hand, the human fact that asks to be developed, not explained, in the course of the story. Hawthorne was indeed peculiarly dependent, as an artist, on his own small corner of the United States; he was never to know any other. He was to go abroad in 1853 and write a novel laid in Rome, *The Marble Faun*, but in his own country he never went farther west than Detroit or farther south than the Potomac. Perhaps more than any other first-rate imagination in our fiction, up to Faulkner, Hawthorne took it for granted that all his imaginative possibilities as a writer were bound up with his own local culture and his history. He studied New England in his notebooks; he looked for its characteristic details and listened for its voice, as if his very life depended on it.

But the great advantage that Hawthorne had over all the realists who took up the New England subject after his death is that, while for most of them New England represented only frustration, decay, and the absurdity of certain moral pretensions, it was exactly the inner life, the moral life, the dim and often unreal life of the soul, reflected as the

perpetual drama of conscience, that seized his imagination. He took for his prime subject precisely that brooding inwardness, that perpetual examination of self, which later, described by realists from without, came out as eccentricity. All that the local colorists and satirists of the New England scene were to paint as provincial stuffiness and inarticulate hardness, Hawthorne had presented as the self-questioning, the debate of so many claims within the human heart, that goes on all the time. Hawthorne's great subject was, indeed, the sense of guilt that is perhaps the most enduring theme in the moral history of the West—guilt that is the secret tie that binds us to others and to our own past; guilt that all the characters in these stories accept and live in because “guilt,” theologically conceived, is human identity. In “guilt” is the great rationale of human history, as Hawthorne knew it; in “guilt” alone is there a task for man to accomplish, a redemption of the past and promise of a future. In the greatest of all Hawthorne's stories, “Young Goodman Brown,” the young husband leaves his bride to go into the wilderness just outside Boston for the ceremony presided over by the Arch-Fiend himself. “‘Welcome, my children,’ said the dark figure, ‘to the communion of your race. You have found thus young your nature and your destiny. By the sympathy of your human hearts for sin ye shall scent out all the places. . . . Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness.’”

The inner life is the secret life—yet the only source of action on the external world. What, finally, most deeply moves us is the grip of the past, the force of the original sin in which we all share. Hawthorne certainly believed this. And even we who are uneasy with the word “sin” now agree with Hawthorne that “human nature,” as we call it, is tainted. We are fascinated by this taint, as Hawthorne was, because it makes fiction possible. Without “sin,” without some sense of the evil that is at work in human affairs to rob this world of its promise, Hawthorne could not have explained to himself the depth of interest involved in the *idea* of personality that dominates his fiction. Unlike the modern novelist, Hawthorne never thought it necessary to account for his characters individually. He believed that there was a common stamp of human nature from which all its characteristics derived. This common stamp created a spiritual interest, an inner motivation in all things, that had to be represented in external terms. This resulted in the allegories that readers

used to find so quaint and odd. Reviewing Hawthorne's stories, Poe pronounced allegory tediously archaic. The young James—not the later one—was embarrassed by allegory. Our own generation is more sympathetic. As the interest of fiction has shifted from the external world back to the individual psyche we have come to see that the inner life is a compelling subject for dramatic fiction and needs "emblems" in the world of commonsense experience in order to be brought home.

As the background and unifying theme of Hawthorne's stories is the human obsession with guilt, so the central character in all these stories is the inward man, the human soul trying to represent itself. The minister's black veil hides his face but proclaims to everyone *his* sense of what things are really about. Wakefield leaves home in order to live nearby with his eye always on his wife—that is *his* idea of human necessity. In "The Prophetic Pictures" the evil soul that the master painter has seen in the happy young bridegroom finally makes its way through the picture and onto the face itself. In story after story the given element, the central and unifying element, is what moves and stirs within us, the mysterious springs of our every action, our "soul." And the way into the soul is so difficult for a writer of fiction—who must write about anything, no matter how shadowy, in terms of the real world—that in his lesser stories, merely sketches or even essays, Hawthorne stated the grand theme and then embroidered moralistic reflections around it.

As a writer of fiction Hawthorne had a peculiarly hard time of it, and since he was so dependent on his will alone, blamed himself for his difficulties. He began with tales that were often nothing but moralities of the inner life, that could not sustain development at all. And though he achieved extraordinary subtlety of meaning in such great stories as "Young Goodman Brown," "Rappaccini's Daughter," and "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," many of his stories show only too well the truth of Henry James's observation that provincialism limited Hawthorne. Our own generation no longer understands the kind of struggle Hawthorne had to put up in order to become a "storyteller" at all; the historic dimension is now left out of our studies of American literature, and all the great writers are treated as timeless contemporaries. But it is a fact that Hawthorne had New England to overcome as well as New England to represent. And while



part of his trouble no doubt lay in the psychic tensions that haunt his fiction,\* the fact remains that just as he could write only when the weather turned cold, so he could never securely believe that he had an understanding audience for what he wrote. The odd facts and observations with which he filled his notebooks, and which astonished Henry James by their triviality, were fillings for "themes"; they show how anxious he was in his profession, how unreal the whole practice of fiction could be to someone in New England with his imaginative tendency, how elusive his work became to him. Not long before he died in the New Hampshire inn, he had recorded in the margins of his last, unfinishable novels a veritable nervous breakdown in his attempts to get hold of his own material. His own characters became unreal to him, and in his panic he seems to have gone back to the uncertainties of his apprentice period, when he would study sunbeams, his face in the mirror, the rain, the outside of a house, as if to force his way into literature—to cross over from his natural tendency to silence.

In Hawthorne's notebooks, in his slighter stories, in the highly personal prefaces he wrote to his novels and collections of stories, one sees this self-training, this determination to make the fullest use of his material, to find even the conventional sentiments, if necessary, that will ease his way through the labyrinth of appearance to the eloquence of the human heart. In his notebooks he seems to be saying of everything and anything: *What can I make of this?* But James, who understood as we do not the limitations of Hawthorne's training, still did not understand how real a spiritual world was to Hawthorne, that it is from his depth of absorption that the extraordinary pages come. Hawthorne is one of the few writers—Franz Kafka is another—able to capture in fiction the reality of a moral tradition that has just lived itself out as religion but has not yet dissolved into mere culture. Hawthorne achieved this by his commitment to an inner world, by his conscious archaism as an allegorist.

The inner life is not eventful and it can never recount itself; it must always be "handled," projected, commented on, mediated, and illustrated. As a subject for fiction, the inner life, the "sinful personality," requires a lot of pointing up and so can be made tolerable only by a superb manner or

\* See Frederick C. Crews, *The Sins Of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (Oxford University Press, 1966).



personal "style." Style always comes from so much attention to moral distinctions, which is why so many New Englanders wrote suavely and elegantly even when they were prudish and provincial. Style in Hawthorne is like color in a painting: it is the surface you see first and that leads you to see the shape of the whole. It is a fact that in Hawthorne's novels nothing much happens until the catastrophe. His tales are equally filled up with style in the eighteenth-century sense—the author in his own voice talks the tale, pointing, explaining, describing, resolving. It is this that makes Hawthorne now seem old-fashioned: *he* tells us a great deal, and always in the same grave voice. Yet as he moves us into the dark wood of "Young Goodman Brown" or the revolutionary Boston of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," we find that the picture "presented," the harsh setting, explains these people and that *they*, above all, explain the setting. Hawthorne convinces us that he knows all about young Goodman Brown, the tragic couple in "The Prophetic Pictures," the heartless wizard in "Rappaccini's Daughter," the tormented Reuben Bourne in "Roger Malvin's Burial" who redeems the guilt of abandoning his father-in-law by accidentally killing his own son. Hawthorne *knows*, he seems to know, because to him the activity of the soul is not complicated; it is just fatally deep. Everything counts, everything tells, every action is fateful in the unraveling of the knot of which we are made.

This reasoning is behind the economy of action in Hawthorne's stories and the close logic of the consequences he draws. Hawthorne saw these distinct qualities of the soul in dramatic relief. Like all those artists of his generation in fiction—Poe, Gogol, Melville—who were fascinated by the inward, the fanciful, the symbolic, he could bring inward traits home to the reader only by making them colorful and picturesque; by dwelling on light and shadow, drapery, costume, reflections in a mirror or a suit of armor. The torches light up the faces in "Young Goodman Brown" excited by the diabolic ceremony; the flowers in Rappaccini's garden are ominous; the Maypole of Merry Mount is hung with ribbons but surrounded by human beings wearing the skins and antlers of animals. Hawthorne's stories could not have come into being without the flowers, mirrors, poisons, and vapors that to romancers of his generation were veritable *dramatis personae*. His stories are rooted in the intellectual melodrama of which his generation was so fond, and which perhaps derived from the very role of the writer himself as