

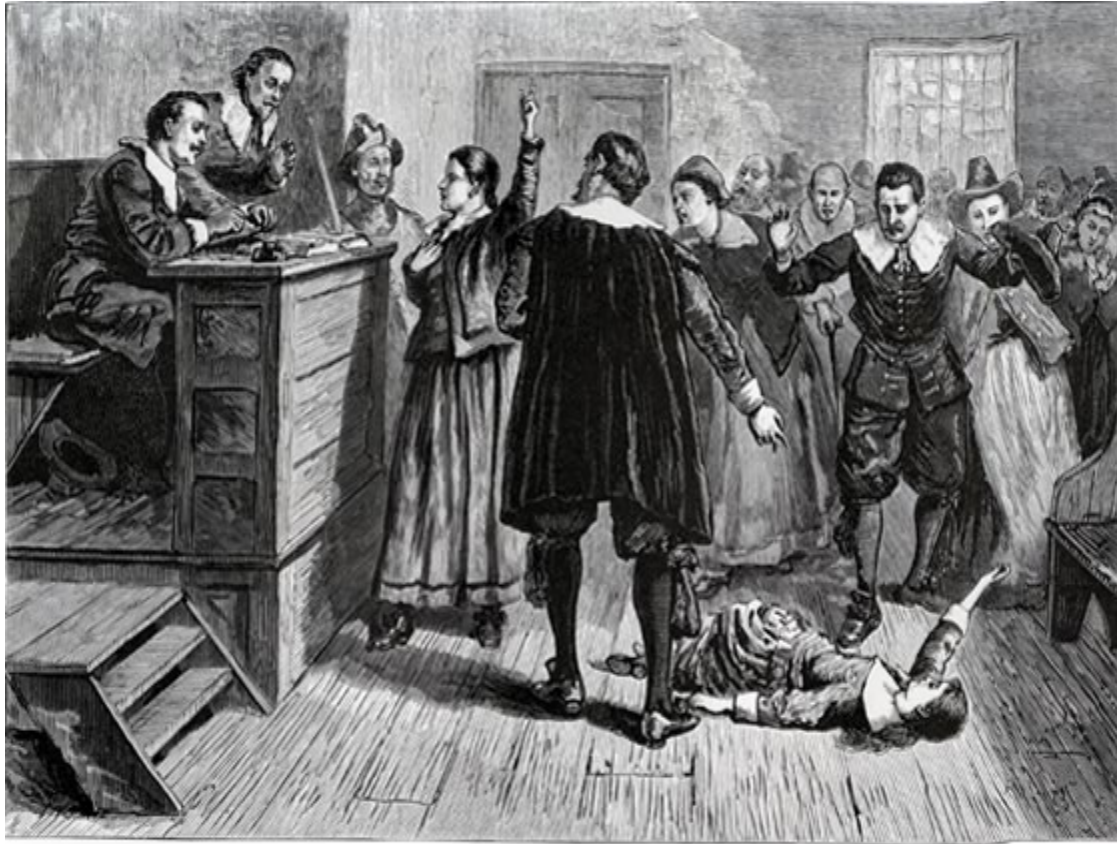
Nathaniel Hawthorne
(1804-64)

Life

- Born in Salem, Mass, 4th of July 1804
- His father died young. Nathaniel lived with his grief-stricken mother in relative isolation as a child
- Puritan background (one of his ancestors, William Hathorne, had been a notable figure, and his great grand-father, John Hathorne, was a magistrate presiding over the witchcraft trials of 1692)

The Salem Witch Trials

- May- October 1692: Salem, Massachusetts
- Constitute a series of investigations and persecutions that caused 19 “witches” to be hanged and many others imprisoned
- Period of public hysteria generated by false accusations and coerced confessions



WITCHCRAFT AT SALEM VILLAGE.

<http://en.wikipedins1.jpg>



EXECUTION OF MRS. ANN HIBBINS.

- Hawthorne's family felt they had been "cursed" by their troubling Puritan past
- Seeking to distance himself from that past, Nathaniel changed his name into Hawthorne
- Much of Hawthorne's writing deploys a lingering sense of guilt because of his Puritan connection

- *Twice Told Tales* (1837), which included “The Minister’s Black Veil”, “The Pay-Pole of Merry Mount”
- Sojourn at Brook Farm in 1841
- Marriage to Sophia Peabody and move to Concord
- *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), which included “Young Goodman Brown” and “The Birth Mark”

- Work at the Custom House in Salem:
- "I am trying to resume my pen... Whenever I sit alone, or walk alone, I find myself dreaming about stories [...]. I should be happier if I could write"
- Loss of his job in 1848
... and loss of his mother ("the darkest hour I ever lived")

- *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)
- Moved to Lenox, Mass, and friendship with Melville (author of *Moby-Dick*)
- *The House of The Seven Gables* (1851), like SL it contains history, legend, superstition and many gothic details

- 1852: return to Concord (neighbours included Emerson, Thoreau and Margaret Fuller)
- *The Blithedale Romance*
- 1857: the family sailed for England and toured Italy and France
- *The Marble Faun* (1860)



The aesthetics of Hawthorne

- Asserts the independence of fiction, but insists that it should be interconnected with human experience

“it is with fiction as with religion: it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie” (letter to Emerson)

Recommended lectures in youtube

- Nathaniel Hawthorne: Return to Puritanism

- *The Scarlet Letter* as an example:
- [This story is] somewhere between the real world and the fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other” (“The Custom House”)
- The novel mixes history and story, reality and invention

- He vindicates the artist's right to work with the tools of the imagination, liberating fiction from its mimetic function
- Fiction as a lamp rather than as a mirror

- The novel is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity to the probable and the ordinary course of man's experience. The romance should be concerned with the truth of the human heart [...].

- And in order to present the complexity of the human heart...
- “The writer has a right to present the truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of his own choosing or creation” (Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*)
- The romance allows “greater freedom and invention”

- Other characteristics:
- Hawthorne's preference for distant times or countries (*The Blithedale Romance* as the only exception)

“No author can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity [...] as is the case with my native land” (Preface to *The Marble Faun*)

- The “imperative of evasion” or the compulsion to escape from the ordinary world as a feature of Hawthorne’s and Melville’s works

Two possible reasons:

A) To distance themselves from the literature that dealt with the ordinary social world: the province of women, “the dammed mob of scribbling women” (Harriet Beecher Stove, Louisa May Alcott, Susan Warner, Maria Cummings...)

B) To dissociate themselves from contemporary American life. “The Custom House” illustrates Hawthorne’s discomfort with contemporary American life and values

Literary themes and styles

- His works are dark meditations on the human condition, often dramatized with a Gothic language loaded with symbolism
- Guilt, hidden sin, evil, individual responsibility and retribution as recurrent topics
- Works have often moral messages and deep psychological insights

On *Mosses from an Old Manse*

“ This blackness pervades through and through. You may be witched by his sunlight, but there is the blackness of darkness beyond” (Herman Melville)

Bibliography

Mellow, James R. *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980.

<http://www.americanwriters.org/writers/hawthorne.asp>