

Nathaniel Hawthorne's Fiction

How Hawthorne's Puritan New England ancestry affected his writing

The purpose of this seminar is to gain a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, the fictional works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, given his awareness that he had relatives who played a leading part in the Salem witch trials of the late 17th century.

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Moderator: | Rich Szlozek |
| Date and Time: | Monday 1:30-3:30 PM 7 weeks, starting February 26, 2018 |
| Format: | Seminar |
| Location: | Smith College Campus Center, Room 102 |

Description: Born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1804, Nathaniel Hawthorne's ancestors included John Hathorne, the only judge involved in the Salem witch trials of the late 17th Century who never repented his role in the trials. Nathaniel later added a "w" to make his name "Hawthorne" in order to hide this relation.

Many of Hawthorne's novels and short stories focus on Puritan New England and revolve around the deep psychological themes of sin, guilt and retribution. But how did Hawthorne's knowledge (and symbolic rejection) of his ancestry affect his writing? In the first several sessions of this seven-week seminar we will examine the history of the criminals, witches and judges of the early New England settlements. This will be followed by discussions of one novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, and several short stories by Hawthorne. Our discussions will focus not only on the themes that permeate Hawthorne's fiction, but how those themes interact with the real history of Puritan New England, of which Hawthorne's ancestors were a part.

Role of participants: This seminar will be discussion-based. During each hour, participants will be responsible for leading a discussion on a section of one of the books we will be reading, or on one of the short stories. The relationship between his writings and the real history of the 17th Century Puritan settlements, the witch trials, and Hawthorne's knowledge of his ancestry will be a focus of these discussions

Resources: Required: *The Devil Made Me Do It: Crime and Punishment in Early New England*, Juliet Mofford. (available new or used)

The Scarlet Letter, Nathaniel Hawthorne (widely available).

Short Stories by Hawthorne will include "Young Goodman Brown" and "The Gray Champion." Most stories can be found in a variety of anthologies, as well as online.

Optional reference book: *Witches*, Stacy Schiff. A complete reading list will be available at the preview.

About the Moderator: Rich Szlosek is a retired attorney who has led more than a dozen seminars in American history and literature.

Maximum number of participants: 12 **Emeriti accepted:** 2

Course # 18SNH