Nathaniel Hawthorne
1804 – 1864

SHORT BIOGRAPHY
• Born on July 4, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts
• Studied at Bowdoin College
• Insufficient earnings as a writer forced him to enter a career as a Boston Custom House measurer in 1839.
• The Scarlet Letter was an immediate success; allowed him to devote himself to his writing.
• Hawthorne became acquainted with Herman Melville and became a major proponent of Melville’s work, but their friendship became strained
• Hawthorne passed away on May 19, 1864 in Plymouth, New Hampshire after a long period of illness in which he suffered severe bouts of dementia. Emerson described his life with the words “painful solitude.”

INFLUENCE
• Salem – early childhood, later work at the Custom House.
• Puritan family background – one of his forefathers was Judge Hathorne, who presided over the Salem witchcraft trials, 1692.
• Belief in the existence of the devil.

MAJOR THEMES
• Alienation: a character is in a state of isolation
• Initiation: involves the attempts of an alienated character to get rid of his isolated condition.
• Problem of Guilt: a character’s sense of guilt forced by the puritanical heritage or by society
• Pride: Hawthorne treats pride as evil. (Spiritual pride in “Goodman Brown”)
• Puritan New England: used as a background and setting in many tales.
• Allegory: Hawthorne’s writing is allegorical, didactic and moralistic.
• Other themes include individual vs. society, self-fulfillment vs. accommodation or frustration, hypocrisy vs. integrity, love vs. hate, exploitation vs. hurting, faith vs. doubt, and fate vs. free will.

MAJOR WORKS
• Twice Told Tales, 1837 Short story collection
• The Scarlet Letter, 1850 Novel
• The House of the Seven Gables, 1851 Novel