



TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

**GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES: LENGUA, LITERATURA Y
CULTURA**

**HAWTHORNE “BEWITCHED”: PURITANISM,
WITCHERY AND SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA
IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE’S FICTION.**

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LÍNEA DE TFG: Literatura Norteamericana de los siglos XVII al XIX

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

CURSO ACADÉMICO: 2022-2023- Convocatoria: Junio

Abstract

The origins of North American literature will always be attached to the religious principles brought about in the colonies of New England by the first European Puritan settlers disembarked at the coasts of Plymouth. Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of the dark romantics of the prolific nineteenth century in the United States who emerged from that Puritan ancestry and whose forefathers, William and John Hathorne, were deeply involved not only in the history of his native Salem and in its witchcraft episode, but also in the whole history of the Massachusetts Bay Colony since the seventeenth century. These familiar and historical facts were very influential in his life and in his literary career. In this paper, I will analyze the impact that all this caused on Hawthorne's literary production.

Keywords

Hawthorne, Puritanism, Salem, witchcraft, devil, sin, supernatural phenomena.

To My Dearest Witches:

My bestie, Helena for her encouragement to go on with this project and with all those yet to come...

To Sandra F.C., for her friendship and "logistic" support from the city of Boston, my favorite place in the world.

To Sandra R., for her "linguistic" support during all the months that we were working together in our respective college studies in English.

Thank You all, for your unconditional love, friendship, and help.

Almu G.C.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Thesis Statement and Objectives

The object of this paper is to analyze the impact of Hawthorne's literature on the society of his time and afterwards by digging into the author's dark thoughts and how his works reflect all his interior conflict with respect to the Puritan religion and the historical past of his own family and his native town of Salem, in which his forefathers were deeply involved. Furthermore, Nathaniel Hawthorne is considered a "dark romantic" for his obscure and pessimistic view of nature connected to the evil workings of the human psyche, being all this reflected in his obscure and sometimes gothic literary style.

1.2 State-of-the-art

I have selected a series of tales and two of Hawthorne's most famous long narratives or "romances": *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* that are related to Puritanism, the supernatural, and the witchcraft crisis of 1692. His Puritan past and the witchcraft crisis in Salem affected him deeply. The witchcraft delusion played a huge role as a literary and sociological phenomenon that has generated a vast quantity of other fictional works. One whole chapter is devoted to the analysis of the tale "Young Goodman Brown" with different sections due to its wide critical reception and the importance it has had in the historical and literary academic circles.

1.3 Methodology

- My research about the Salem Witch Trials is primarily based on two books of two scholars in this field: Mary Beth Norton and Emerson W. Baker.
- For Hawthorne's work, I have explored some critical reviews on his fiction and several journal articles that discuss certain elements contained in his short stories and romances and their connection with Puritanism and the Salem Witch Trials. The data bases accessed have mainly been *LION* and *JSTOR*.

2. The Puritanical Origins and Witchcraft

Old Matthew Maule, in a word, was executed for the crime of witchcraft. He was one of the martyrs to that terrible delusion, which should teach us, among its other morals, that the influential classes, and those who take upon themselves to be leaders of the people, are fully liable to all the passionate error that has ever characterized the maddest mob.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, p. 13.

In the lines above, one of his most acclaimed “romances,”¹ Hawthorne reassures his position regarding the 1692 witchcraft delusion that began in Salem Village—current town of Danvers—and the trials taking place at Salem Town, that finally swept away a large part of Essex County in the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Norton 8).

The weird and sad event is by no means the most frequent in people convicted for witchery, but it was one of the most notable in North America, since its impact on the history and on the founding of the new American Nation was immense; a nation that was emerging, and in 1692, it was only but a feeble offspring of what would become eighty-four years later in its declaration of independence from “Mother England.”

Most of Hawthorne’s narrators give us this sort of authorial comments in an ironical mode questioning these Puritanical morals and giving us many clues of his internal conflicts concerning faith and religion in this regard.

Being born and raised in Salem in a Unitarian family, some might see him as a kind of religious skeptic or rather an “analyst” of the American religious past. However, his Puritan origins were present during all his lifetime, and pervaded his career as a writer.



Fig. 1. Anthony, Edward, Contributor, and Mathew B Brady. *Nathaniel Hawthorne*. [New York: Edward Anthony, to 1876] Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/2021669468/>.

¹ Hawthorne did not consider his longer literary works as novels but as romances. He treats extensively this issue in the preface of his acclaimed “romance” *The House of the Seven Gables*.

William Hathorne was his first ancestor to arrive in the colonies in 1630 and he was a powerful merchant and a member of the House of Deputies representing Salem when this institution was first established. He was known for prosecuting Quakers and even ordered some of them to be whipped throughout the town. This way, the Ha(w)thorne family settled in New England and began a series of religious persecutions that forever remained imprinted in the family as an indelible footprint. So “Good William” was the first, but not the last, since his son, John Hathorne, Hawthorne’s great grandfather, was one of the harshest judges of the Salem Witch Trials who showed neither sympathy nor much Christian charity with the accused for witchery. There is a general consensus agreeing that Nathaniel Hawthorne added the “w” to his last name to take distance from that outrageous event in which his ancestor judge Hathorne was terribly involved and never asked for forgiveness. Emerson W. Baker speculates in his book *A Storm of Witchcraft* with the more romanticized idea, that the **w** means **witch**; a sort of personal “scarlet letter” imprinted in his inner self (268).

Whatever the case it be, the reality is that the Puritan past of New England and of his own family, was a cause of torment to him. Indeed, William Hathorne is mentioned —although not named— in the introductory chapter of *The Scarlet Letter* entitled “The Custom House.” Hawthorne as first-person narrator alludes to his forefather as being “present in my boyish imagination as far as I can remember” and “(he) stills haunts me” (7). Thus, Hawthorne was deeply tormented by the role of his Puritan forefathers and the past events in which both William and John Hathorne took part. Taking advantage of this fact, he shaped his own writing style and subject matter in the emergent American Renaissance period of the pre-civil war in the United States.

As many of his contemporaries, Hawthorne began to publish first anonymously. In her textbook *American Literature to 1900*, Teresa Gibert surveys Hawthorne’s literary works in their original phase of his life and career. Before 1837, all his pieces were first published anonymously or under pseudonym in periodicals, magazines and annuals that were sold as Christmas gift books. Then, in the same year 1837, he published his first collection, *Twice-Told Tales*, which was in fact a compilation of eighteen tales that first were issued in periodicals, and, for the first time, it appeared his own name in the edition (219). Some of

those stories which had remained unpublished until many years later, when he already enjoyed fame and reputation, are however the most interesting in terms of analyzing their Puritan influences and, above all, the Salem witchcraft delusion.

Since Hawthorne was a perfectionist and subversive analyst of the Puritan morality, after writing some of his works, he did not consider them worthy enough to be published or taken into consideration. This is perhaps the reason why his first “romance” written in 1828 while he was at Bowdoin College and which he called *Fanshawe*, was presumably “repudiated” and self-censored, since he destroyed all the remaining copies years after and banned its reprint during his lifetime (Gibert 219). He probably felt ashamed of a too immature work of his youth, and for many years this self-deprecating attitude was deeply installed in his inner self until he succeeded with his first two long narratives: *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). Moreover, he sometimes felt that his literary creativity was not valued enough by publishers and the public and that, in his own words taken from the “Preface” of *Twice-Told Tales*, he was “for a good many years, the obscurest man of letters in America” (qtd. in Gibert 219).

3. Hawthorne’s Eighteenth-Century Literary Sources

Nathaniel Hawthorne did a fiery inventory and thorough study of his own family and his Puritan forefathers that inspired his literary career, above all, the Hathornes of the seventeenth century, but he also perused many of the records and critiques that after the witchcraft crisis were written about his hometown’s most remembered event. It is believed that he gathered a great amount of information and documents from the Athenaeum at Salem (Baym 370), and read many of the Puritan sermons before and after the trials. He also was inspired by the reading in his childhood of John Bunyan’s Puritan allegory *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678).

During the 1820s and 1830s, the decades that coincide with his first writings including one of his most acclaimed tales nowadays, “Young Goodman Brown,” Hawthorne took time to read several books and histories enumerated by John Ronan in his journal article “Young Goodman Brown and the Mathers,” such as Francis Hutchinson’s *An Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft* (1718),

Daniel Neal's *The History of New-England* (1720), Thomas Hutchinson's *The History of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay* (1767), and from Hawthorne's own period, Charles W. Upham's *Lectures on Witchcraft* (1831) (Ronan 257). But, perhaps the most influential one was Robert Calef's *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700).

All the works mentioned were indeed rather influenced by Calef's own view on the witchcraft crisis, and as we will see below, Calef's *More Wonders* puts the focus on and directly blames the Puritan reverends Increase and Cotton Mather for the widespread of the panic among New England's population of the threat of witchcraft and the existence of spectral evidence, a topic widely treated sarcastically by Hawthorne in some of his tales and long narratives. Spectral evidence was the belief that people who have been bewitched were harmed by specters or supernatural apparitions of other people who damage them physically and psychologically (Ronan 254). This issue is an important part of his tale "Young Goodman Brown" explored below.

Hawthorne also gathered information about the trials by perusing the sermons of another Puritan Minister, Deodat Lawson, who was Samuel Parris' predecessor in the parsonage of Salem Village, where the delusion began.

4. Some of Hawthorne's "Bewitched" Tales

This section contains a selection and a brief overview of some of Hawthorne's short stories and sketches that have indirect connections to Puritanism and the supernatural. In separate sections, I will be analyzing in more detail other short stories and long narratives that better exemplify the "bewitched" and puritanical tone contained in his fiction.

Hawthorne's religious conflict is shown in most of his literary works in which binary oppositions such as good and evil, light and darkness, grace and sin, exemplify the virtues and the faults of Puritanism and his own religious, ambivalent faith. For this reason, in this section I am referring more generally to some of those tales that are named *allegories* and ironically *parables*, which mostly contain moralizing messages and are subjected to several interpretations.

Besides, some of these fictions do not offer a clear-cut resolution leaving the endings open to a multiplicity of interpretations.

4.1 “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1835)

“The Minister’s Black Veil,” ironically subtitled “A Parable,” published in 1836 in *The Token*² is about a Puritan minister, Mr. Hooper, who hides his face behind a black veil that “entirely concealed his features, except the mouth and chin” (410), causing the uneasiness of his whole congregation and Elizabeth’s refusal, his fiancé, to marry him if he does not remove it from his face. This tale might have something of autobiographical, in the sense that, Hawthorne himself assured in the first chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*, “The Custom House,” that it was his intention to “still keep the inmost Me behind its veil” (3). Therefore, he probably was hiding his real personality from the public eye in the same way the Puritan minister, Mr. Hooper, was trying to conceal some sin or crime never revealed in the plot though.

Edgar Allan Poe thought that he had solved this mystery of Mr. Hooper’s concealment behind his black veil. Poe pointed out that when the Reverend Hooper attends the funeral of a young woman and sees her corpse that “had slightly shuddered” (412), he is indeed showing certain closeness to the deceased. To Poe, that issue could mean that when “that a crime of dark dye, has been committed, is a point which only minds congenial with that of the author will perceive” (331). Therefore, Poe seemed to believe that probably the dead lady and the minister had had a hid affair and that was the reason why, from that moment on, the minister hides behind the veil considering himself a terrible sinner who needs to conceal his guilt from the rest of the world, even his closest ones, including his own fiancé.

The fact of not knowing with certainty this occult reason causes in the reader the same frustration as the minister probably feels of being eternally hidden behind the veil, according to Leland S. Person (48). To him and to J. Hillis Miller, “the story is an allegory of the reader’s own situation in reading it” (105).

² *The Token* was a publication edited by Samuel Goodrich from 1828 to 1842 which included collections of poetry and prose and that were intended to promote American writers by publishing their works as Christmas and New Year’s gifts. More information in <https://www.merrycoz.org/voices/token/TOKEN.xhtml>

This way, Hawthorne makes us look for explanations that lead us to think about the specific reason of the veil. Yet, it is ironic that the Minister's sermons improve from the moment that he starts wearing the veil. This may be interpreted as indication that not everything in the human mind can be explained in logical terms and therefore, the assumption that the face is the sign of selfhood and that it can always be read is not totally true, because we will never know what is behind one's metaphoric veil (Miller 92).

4.2 “The May-pole of Merry Mount” (1835)

“The May-pole of Merry Mount” is an allegory written in 1835 and it was also published in *The Token* in 1836. It also appeared later in *Twice-Told Tales* in 1837. According to Leland S. Person, this sketch reflects “Hawthorne's complex attitude towards Puritanism” (44) because a conflict between pagan festivities and the Puritan's rigidity is exposed. One of the governors of Massachusetts, John Endicott, defied Thomas Morton's settlement at Mount Wollaston or Merry Mount —today Quincy, Massachusetts— established in 1627.

Nina Baym explains that the maypole was an English tradition and a festivity happened in spring and in midsummer when this story takes place, in which a pole is placed on an important site of the village and decorated with flowers where young people dance and enjoy around it (401). Obviously, this kind of entertainment was rejected by Puritans. Even some years later, in 1686, Increase Mather despised dancing in his sermon *An Arrow Against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing*. In this writing, the father of Cotton Mather assures that dancing in itself is not bad, unless it was “Gynecandrical Dancing” or “mixt” dancing (21), that is, dancing of men and women together, which was considered sinful and scandalous for the pious divine. This gives us an idea of Puritan's intolerance to “promiscuous dancing” and to music itself, except when that music had a liturgical purpose and was not then a manifestation of promiscuity and pagan practices.

Thus, Merry Mount was a threat to Puritan hegemony because it was a pagan “gay colony,” so, the Governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop, ordered to burn this settlement down (Person 44). However, Hawthorne sets this story just before, when Endicott first invaded the place and cut down the maypole (44).

Thomas Morton, the founder's colony of Mount Wollaston, was a fur-trader who was later deported to England under suspicion of being corrupted and been embarked in illegal business trade with the Natives. This way, Endicott took advantage of this situation to getting rid of this maypole considered by the Puritans a pagan and sinful symbol (Baym 401). John N. Miller thinks of this tale to be an ironical attack of the Puritans to all that had to do with carnivalesque practices and mythological fantasy. In these terms, Hawthorne could also consider this Puritanical thought a direct attack to his own imagination and creativity (122). "It was the Puritan of Puritans; it was Endicott Himself!" (406) says the narrator sarcastically.

Binaries are clearly seen here in the dichotomous conflict between the revelers who enjoy themselves in this party that celebrates the English tradition of the maypole and the Puritans' imposition of order and decorum, jollity vs gloom, and innocence vs "post-lapsarian sin" (Miller 112). These allegorical polarities included in the plot may also reflect Hawthorne's own ambivalent conflict within these two extremes (Miller 113). On the other side, Leland S. Person considers another dichotomy here parting from the Puritan Calvinist authority: the battle between Puritans and the more "naturalistic" Merry Mounters, which is brought to Hawthorne's present nineteenth-century period, in which Puritan religion had evolved and parted into the Unitarian and Transcendentalist movements separately (44–45).

The joyous couple formed by Edgar and Edith who are getting married in this festive day, is questioned in the same way as Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*, since both couples dare to challenge Puritan stricture and decorum (Person 44). The "promiscuous" celebration of the couple's wedding is penalized because, as Increase Mather would say, "it cannot be tolerated in such a place as New England, without great sin" (21). Although the story seems to take place before Mather's sermon, it is likely that Hawthorne knew about it and applied it indirectly to his story of the pagan and indecorous Merry Mounters who dare to dance men and women together immorally around the maypole.

At first, Endicott claims that Edgar and Edith are going to be punished by being whipped, but, at the end, the Puritans decide that it is enough to dress them

in “garments of a more decent fashion” (408) and to have them re-educated in the Puritan more decorous and less sinful values and restraint. Endicott shows some “Puritan sympathy” and feels moved by the love the couple professes for each other when Edgar and Edith are willing to sacrificing themselves for love and being punished to save each other’s life.

Harold Bloom sees another interesting point of connection here making a comparison and a contrast at the same time between Puritans and pagans by asserting that “the whipping post is the Puritan equivalent to the Maypole” (38). This way, Puritans finally imposed their restrictive rules over other “indecorous” customs.

4.3 “The Devil in Manuscript” (1835)

This story appeared firstly in the *New England Magazine* of November 1835 (Kopley 29–30), and then was collected in *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales* (1852). Even though this fiction does not have to do directly with Puritanism or witchcraft, it does have to do with the interior “demons” of Hawthorne as a writer and his sometimes-self-deprecating attitude towards his literary work for which himself was many times his most ferocious critic.

This tale works hence as an autobiographical attempt for Hawthorne to express himself in his dual conflictive necessity of considering his creativity as valuable enough, and, in a kind of epiphany, he tries to “burn” into the flames what he considers is a work of a “fiend” inside his mind (Bidney 60).

The mythical character of Oberon is an alter ego for Hawthorne’s purposes whom he, as a writer, may feel identified with. Hawthorne relates how some of the stories that would never be published have been somehow “possessed” by a diabolical spirit and when they are consumed by flames, they acquire that devilish power. Oberon tells the narrator —probably himself in both roles as the narrator and his Oberonic alter ego—: “Oh! I have a horror of what was created in my own brain, and shudder at the manuscripts in which I gave that dark idea a sort of material existence. Would they were out of my sight!” (331). The several times that Hawthorne himself had to deal with the rejection of publishing his works on the publishers’ part is also made explicit in the text: “They have been offered, by

letter,' ... reddening with vexation, 'to some seventeen booksellers ... only that I burnt them as fast as they arrived" (331).

The sketch may also be an allusion to Hawthorne himself writing several stories that never came to light because he did not consider them good enough to be published or that he wanted to destroy as it happened with his repudiated first novel *Fanshawe*. In fact, Susan Manning alludes to this very condition of "Oberonic presence" more visible in this tale, to highlight Hawthorne's authorial voice (243), which is contradictory and reflects Hawthorne's own doubts regarding his creativity and worthiness as an author.

Furthermore, fire plays a binary role for good and evil. As Binder points out, it represents "the universal goodness and badness" (61) functioning the flames as something diabolic that represent the devilish acts and at the same time, as an element of purification once those hellish papers are burned. The denouement of the story is also representative of a dichotomy of failure and success from Oberon's part, since the flames provoked by the burning of his manuscripts diabolically go out from the fireplace through the chimney and produce a fire in the town, transforming Oberon in that moment in a sort of demon who is happy of setting the town on fire and provoking that people become mad and frightened because of it: "'My tales!' cried Oberon. 'The chimney! The roof! The Fiend has gone forth by night, and startled thousands in fear and wonder from their beds! Here I stand a triumphant author! Huzza! Huzza! My brain has set the town on fire! Huzza'" (337).

4.4 "Ethan Brand" (1850)

This tale is subtitled "A Chapter of an Abortive Romance," and was written in 1850 and included in *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales*. As in "The Devil in Manuscript," the element of fire is again of utmost importance in this fiction with a double meaning of diabolic power vs purification. The plot is about a man who decides to go in search of the Unpardonable Sin, sacrificing "the heart for the intellect" as Person puts it (111). However, his search turns to be a complete failure, and when he comes back to the village expecting to receive the applause and recognition of the villagers, he finds that no one believes him and takes him for a crazy individual, rather than one who has committed a such terrible sin and

that must be feared and “admired” for it. This rejection provokes on him his decision to throw himself into a lime kiln, which becomes a sort of gateway to hell (Harris 70).

The supernatural character of this fiction is seen in the fact that Ethan Brand wants to consider himself a kind of Satan with the element of fire to provoke the devilish image that so frightens little Joe, the lime burner’s son, who sees in Brand a man who laughs with no joy, but with bitterness (Harris 71). Brand’s grievous laugh and his bright eyes is what Joe perceives as devilish. In his naiveness, Joe is the character who most intuitive appears towards Brand’s supernatural power.

But, what is the Unpardonable Sin? “It is a sin that grew within my own breast” (1056), says Brand when he is questioned about it. And then, he explains it more thoroughly in the following paragraph:

A sin that grew nowhere else! The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man, and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims! The only sin that deserves a recompense of immortal agony! Freely, were it to do again, would I incur the guilt. Unshrinkingly, I accept the retribution! (1057)

Hawthorne explains in *The American Notebooks* that this sin consists of being “in want of love and reverence for the human soul” (106). That is, that although Brand wants his “evil” intellect to prevail over his heart, he is indeed in a desperate search for love and recognition. According to Nina Baym, this is more meaningful of Hawthorne’s moral universe, since “no sin of the hot heart compares in gravity with the sins of the cold intellect” (31).

This heart and head dichotomy seen by Baym is also seen by other critics such as Mark Harris. However, to Harris, this imposition of the intellect over Brand’s cold heart is just but the confirmation of his failure even when he attempts desperately to present his Unpardonable Sin as a success, but the villagers and Bartram, the lime-burner, only see in him a common man who has gone mad. In his failed try of appearing successful in his search, Brand finally commits suicide by throwing himself into the hellish fire of the kiln (Harris 73).

The subtitle chosen by Hawthorne “A Chapter of an Abortive Romance,” can have more to do with this failure of Brand’s having found the Unpardonable

Sin that with the fact that this tale could be another long narrative in process in Hawthorne's imagination that never came to light. Moreover, to Hawthorne's conflictive mind, the controversial encounter of this sin was also contrasted in dual terms and with manifold interpretations as with most of his fiction with a no clear resolution. Hawthorne thus, leaves to the reader's interpretation Ethan Brand's failure or success in his search in the same contradictory terms he could consider himself as a failure or a successful fiction writer.

5. "Alice Doane's Appeal" (1835) and the Torment of Gallows Hill

There are many tales and sketches by Hawthorne that deal directly or indirectly with the Puritan past, his ancestors, and the witch trials. But perhaps, the two tales that more straightforwardly deal with the witchcraft delusion, apart from "Young Goodman Brown," are "Alice Doane's appeal" and "Main Street" that we will see in the next section.

It is very likely that "Alice Doane's Appeal" had to be modified and with some parts cut out by Hawthorne before being published in *The Token*, since the story seems fragmented, unfinished and with no apparent coherent plot. Seymour L. Gross and Robert H. Fossum's articles about this tale coincide in this regard. Hawthorne wrote this tale with the purpose of including it as a piece of his unpublished *Seven Tales of My Native Land*, but, in need of money, he had to "rethink" this story by cutting some controversial paragraphs regarding the incestuous love and jealousy of Leonard and Alice Doane, two siblings who are related with the murder of one man called Walter Brome who seems to be their half-brother at the end. Samuel Goodrich, *The Token's* editor, could think of the inappropriateness of this issue for his "genteel readers" and as a result, he probably asked Hawthorne to cut out some fragments and to sacrifice what otherwise could have been a very good piece of short fiction, very representative of the tragedy of the witchcraft delusion (Gross 233).

"Alice Doane's Appeal" is a metafictional sketch, that is, a story within another story with a moralizing message of "never forget" and with the background of the Salem executions for witchcraft. In this story, the author places the characters in the hill "where superstition won her darkest triumph; the high place where our fathers set up their shame, to the mournful gaze of generations

far remote. The dust of martyrs was beneath our feet. We stood on Gallows Hill” (205).



Fig. 2. *Gallows Hill Park*, Salem, MA, circa 2010. Photo Credit: Rebecca Brooks. Retrieved from <https://historyofmassachusetts.org/where-is-the-real-gallows-hill/>

Once and again, Hawthorne alludes to the shame and pain that caused him so much trouble during all his life; the Puritan guilt that was a burden to him, what he considered the infinite superstition and hysteria that carried nineteen people,

fourteen women and five men, to the hanging tree at Gallows Hill. According to Baker, “the narrator mourns the lack of appreciation for the past, particularly, the ‘martyrs’ buried on the hill” (269). Indeed, the narrator takes advantage of telling a story to his hearers, two young women, about these siblings and Alice’s search for redemption and forgiveness in the graveyard of Walter Brome, that apparently has nothing to do with the executions carried out there, to finally immerse them into the tragedy of that very place.

As Seymour L. Gross asserts in his article, “this is the only story which is *told about* rather than *told*” (232), so its apparent lack of inconsistency is balanced with the retelling of the sad episode of the people hanged in that place. The execution for witchcraft as such is a topic that Hawthorne had not treated so directly in other stories apart from *The House of the Seven Gables*. Therefore, this is the greatest value of this story for critics such as Gross and Fossum: its historical reference and Hawthorne’s own conflictive creativity as a fiction writer and as a storyteller of factual history. Furthermore, to Fossum, this story is quite significant despite its flaws, since it shows Hawthorne’s attempts to relate past and present and to blend fact and fiction, as well as it reflects his own conflict

regarding the worth of his work, that is, “his dilemmas as a writer of historical romance” (294).

The evil workings of the wizard towards the siblings Alice and Leonard Doane by twisting reality functions as a nod to the Salem episode, provided that the wizard seems to be controlling the characters in this tale in the same way as Satan manipulated people at Salem with spectral evidence through the supposed witches.

Throughout storytelling, the narrator wants to control his two female listeners’ emotions with his both accounts, the fictional and the real. The women indeed do not take very seriously the story of incest about the siblings but end up crying at the end of the story with the sad real event occurred in that place. Leland S. Person considers this as the “victory” of the narrator over his hearers, or Hawthorne’s own victory over his readers/listeners of his literary works (37).

6. “Main Street” (1849). The Allegorical Representation of Old New England’s Puritan Values

“Main Street” is one of those stories which, as “Young Goodman Brown,” provides an allegorical and metaphorical meaning with a moralizing lesson that once more reflects Hawthorne’s internal conflict with his New England Puritan ancestors and the past of his native town of Salem.

This tale, written in 1849 and published in the collection *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales* (1852), is a kind of timeline that begins with the settlement in the first decades of the seventeenth century and ends in 1717 with the real and metaphorical burial of Salem due to the Great Snow. The first-person narrator talks about “my daily walks along the principal street of my native town” (1023) and, with a Shakespearean metatheatrical device, introduces a showman who tries to perform a puppet play in a rather modest representation, harshly criticized by a very conservatist and realistic-like spectator. This puppet-show does display what is called symbolically “Main Street” at Salem, a place and time setting that the showman carefully describes since the Puritan origins of the town. This showman, who sometimes gives the impression of fusing with Hawthorne

himself, or with the narrative voice in this case, gives a full account of facts and historical personages along the first half of the story.

The apparition in the plot of the “red men” or Indians is remarkable. The showman alludes to the breaking out of King Philip’s War, or First Indian War (1675-1678), that began in Rhode Island and Plymouth Colonies (Norton 83), but points out that they did not yet vanish with it. In fact, the conflict between Wabanakis and the New Englanders continued with the Second Indian War, or King William’s War, that started in 1688, just around three years before the witchcraft trials at Salem (Norton 93–94). But, finally, after the struggles between Natives and settlers, the showman asks himself and the audience if this is not “the story of the vast growth and prosperity of one race, and the fated decay of another?” (1042) referring to the final suppression of Native Indians —the red men— and their territories by the English settlers.

In addition to the “red men” episode, his story continues with the “worshipful Captain Curwen” (1043), a real historical character who led the condemned prisoners to Gallows Hill, “The witches!” (1043), and then, the moralizing and ironical tone begins again by naming all the real participants, accusers, convicted, afflicted, and men of good reputation, including Cotton Mather, “wise Cotton Mather” (1046), who claimed that “all has been religiously and justly done” (1046) before the crowd of Gallows Hill where minister George Burroughs was hanged. This authorial comment, for sure not void of sarcasm and bitterness, is due to the Mathers’ participation in the trials that I will explore more deeply in the section dedicated to “Young Goodman Brown.” But here, Mather is “infamously” present, and as in “Alice Doane’s Appeal,” we could say that “for God’s and Hawthorne’s Appeal.”

Marion L. Starkey, author of *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (1949), also wrote an article on Mather’s *The Wonders of the Invisible World* in which she accuses Mather of playing a “negligible part” in the prosecution of the supposed witches and wholly “discreditable” because of the tragic consequences of this infamous episode (616). It was indeed a terrible and wicked involvement of Cotton Mather and other Puritan ministers of which Hawthorne is quite recurrent alluding to them straightforwardly in this sketch very wittily and sarcastically as he also did in his other tales.

The listing of some of the executed “witches” and “wizards” that Hawthorne names through his showman, marks again Hawthorne’s insistence in using real people in his fiction: Martha Carrier, the Reverend George Burroughs, George Jacobs, John Proctor and his wife, Elizabeth, all of them were hanged on the ominous day of August 19th, 1692; souls that Hawthorne claims ironically to be possessed by the “Black Man” who “tempted him with great heaps of gold” (1044). He also addresses this way to the “Indian woman, Tituba” (1046), the Parris’ household slave, who was first an accused and then also an accuser of other witches’ felonies. Tituba was accused of tormenting Betty and Abigail, Samuel Parris’ daughter and niece respectively. But then, Tituba declared that she was “forced” to do these terrible things to the girls by the “specters” of other women. Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne were also accused of tormenting these girls and others that were beginning to experiment fits and hallucinations, as Norton states (23). It was thus in Samuel Parris’ parsonage where all this delusion began.

After gathering all these historical events in New England, the story finishes with the end of the representation of the showman’s performance by shedding some light and hope in the change which is now in progress after the Great Snow of 1717. With the burial of Salem and its “Main Street,” a new beginning in which “mankind should be at liberty to enter on new paths” since “the race be not extinct” (1049) is optimistically expected. The author leaves open the possibility of this positive change. However, the conservative critic among the spectators is asking for a refund of his quarter for considering the performance a total “humbug.” This may mean that, no matter there exists human beings that claim for progress and change, there will always exist too some reluctance to changes that come from the most radical conservatism and antiquity of New England that sadly continued to influence negatively in that progress in Hawthorne’s time.

7. “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) and the Divine Predestination

“Young Goodman Brown” deserves a special section because of its incredible impact in both critics and readers of subsequent periods, since it has been more studied in the twentieth and twenty first centuries than it was in its own period, although it was praised by Herman Melville for its “blackness” (Gibert 224).

“Young Goodman Brown” was not published in *Twice-Told Tales* but in a subsequent collection called *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846). It was first included as a simple piece in the *New England Magazine* in April 1835 (Baker 363n34) and it recreates the idea of the Puritan predestination and the dangers of feeling secure in the belief of being one of the “chosen,” again combined with the historical background of the Salem Witch Trials. This belief of its main character, Goodman Brown, newlywed to Faith, of being totally free from sin and going to hell regardless his evil acts and his dark errand through the forest to meet the devil and the witches’ Sabbath, is the allegorical device used metaphorically to expose the “Rise and Fall” of religious beliefs as well as his protagonist.

Furthermore, the grief and hopeless denouement with which Hawthorne finishes the story is a case in point that symbolizes the religious decadence of Puritanism after the settlement of the colony in the 1620s and 1630s which increased during the last decades of the seventeenth century. As Teresa Gibert points out:

... its protagonist does not represent orthodox Calvinism as exemplified by first-generation Puritans, but a declining form of religion held by a troubled and confused third generation of Puritans who were the historical victims of an altered relationship with God. (224)

Some critics agree with the idea that Goodman Brown is a “false convert,” an “Everyman” who does not really understand the Calvinist principles of predestination and original sin. Jane Donahue Eberwein analyzes this important point considering that apart from psychology, the Puritan theology and its morality operate in this story significantly. She also argues that “Young Goodman Brown” is indeed “Hawthorne’s representation of a false conversion” (19), an idea also shared by Ronan (255).

7.1 Historical and Literary Context

“Young Goodman Brown” is likely to be drawn upon Cotton Mather’s *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693) and other sources in which Hawthorne imbued himself at the Salem Athenaeum.³ He once more turns back to his

³ See the section entitled “Hawthorne’s Eighteenth-Century Literary Sources to Develop His Works” in this same paper.

traumatic familiar past to make interesting connections carefully studied by literary critics and scholars.

In general terms, “Young Goodman Brown” is based on the witchcraft narratives by the Mathers, Increase, and his son Cotton, and the subsequent critical work by Robert Calef of Cotton Mather’s “ignominious” *Wonders*, which was called *More Wonders of the Invisible World* published in 1700 and which was an overt critique of the part played by Cotton Mather and his *Wonders* in the whole issue. Moreover, the narrator of “Young Goodman Brown” quotes Cotton Mather’s infamous words in which he describes the executed “witch” Martha Carrier as a “Rampant Hag” (235) just moments before she was hanged on August 19th, 1692.

John Ronan makes a deep analysis of the relationship between the Mathers, the Hathornes, Goodman Brown, and, more surprisingly, the Minister George Burroughs, also hanged at Gallows Hill the same day as Martha Carrier. This point of connection with George Burroughs is more than curious and offers us many clues regarding the historical context of the trials and the terrible involvement of Hawthorne’s great grandfather, judge John Hathorne, in the whole issue.

Back again to the familiar branch of the Hathornes that arrived in New England in the first decades of the seventeenth century, Ronan does find that major William Hathorne ordered the whipping of Ann Coleman among other prosecuted Quakers. Moreover, we know that William was the father of the judge John Hathorne and his brother, Captain William Hathorne, who fought in King Philip’s War and married Sarah Ruck. This familiar antecedent also seems to appear indirectly in the story, since when Captain Hathorne died a decade before the trials, Sarah Ruck married the Minister George Burroughs, who was hanged by order of the Court of Oyer and Terminer in which John Hathorne, William Hathorne’s brother, was one of the judges (Ronan 255–56). In fact, Ronan believes that the initials of the name of the protagonist, Goodman Brown, (G.B.) are inspired by Mather’s epithet for George Burroughs (253). Therefore, to Ronan, the protagonist, **Goodman Brown**, is likely to be the fictitious son of Captain William Hathorne, since he died childless, and hence, he would be the stepson of **George Burroughs** (Ronan 256).

Now, let us analyze the role played by the Mathers in the witchcraft crisis and in Hawthorne's tale.

The persistent Cotton Mather, who had previously led a witchcraft case in Boston

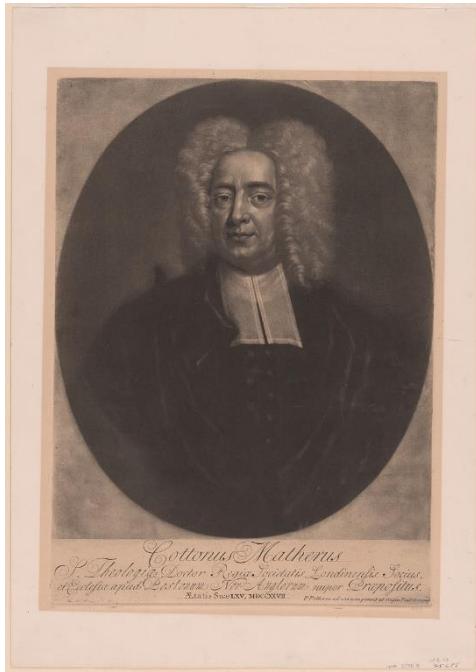


Fig. 3. Peter Pelham. *Cotton Mather*, 1727, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://www.si.edu/object/npg_S_NPG.75.5

in 1688 and helped to condemn and execute Goody Glover, the supposed witch who was afflicting the Goodwin children, prepared a document warning about the dangers of considering only spectral evidence as a proof and to “show and exceeding tenderness” towards the accused, especially if they had not been convicted before (Burgan 59–61). However, he hypocritically “passed the buck” with the trials at Salem indirectly and finally he gave a hand to the magistrates of the cases. In the following year, 1693, he reunited his sermons and writings about witchcraft in the famous book *The Wonders of the Invisible World* so criticized by Robert Calef in 1700.

There is no doubt that, in addition to blaming his ancestors for the witchcraft delusion, Hawthorne blamed equally Increase and Cotton Mather for their final involvement and support of the trials and the whole process.

Furthermore, Hawthorne believed that Increase and Cotton Mather had contributed to spread the panic to witchcraft and Satan all around the Massachusetts Bay Colony through their sermons and writings before and after the cases. Cotton aggravated the disaster with his compilation *The Wonders of the Invisible World* with also had the purpose of launching a religious revival in Massachusetts (Ronan 257).

Ronan also cites Michael J. Colacurcio and his book *The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales* (1984) in which Colacurcio assumes that Satan in the story could represent Increase Mather (311–12), since the Evil One is described as a fifty-year-old version of Goodman Brown “taken for father

and son” (226), and as if he was his father. The Mathers could be represented here, as Satan and his son Goodman Brown, being the latter a metonym for Cotton (Colacurcio 311–12). However, Ronan does not totally agree with Colacurcio’s interpretation and thinks that Goodman Brown is not like Cotton Mather, providing that he is a “simple husbandman” and a false convert to the Puritan **Faith** (255).

The biographical and familiar details offered in the fiction are striking. Satan informs Goodman Brown that his grandfather “lashed (a) Quaker woman... through the streets of Salem” (227). As aforementioned, she was Ann Coleman, who was ordered to be whipped by William Hathorne. In addition, Satan tells Brown that his deceased father fought in King Philip’s War, as Major William Hathorne did, John Hathorne’s brother (Ronan 255). All of them were Hawthorne’s relatives.

Hence, after having analyzed the historical and familiar implications involved in the tale, I am more inclined to Ronan’s theory that Satan and Goodman Brown were in reality the Hathornes rather than the Mathers, William Hathorne would be Goodman Brown’s father, and perhaps, Brown would be the judge John Hathorne, or in another possibility observed by Ronan above, Goodman Brown could be then the stepson of the condemned Reverend George Burroughs.

Perhaps, rather than attend to these hypotheses separately, we should think that Hawthorne’s intention was to intermingle all these people as a cobweb being the characters a part of all these real people mentioned. It is very likely that in Hawthorne’s imagination all of them had their direct implication in the history of the witchcraft delusion, either as victims or as perpetrators.

7.2 Symbolism inside the Plot

One of the most noteworthy symbols inside this story is the dark forest in which Goodman Brown wants to “enjoy” his errand. The night is also significant, since, according to Gibert, it may be probably the night of 31st of October —Halloween— (225n7). Faith tells Brown “Pray, tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all

nights in the year!" (225). In her comment, Faith is highlighting the danger hidden in this particular night.

John Ronan also painstakingly analyzes the plot and all its symbolism implied. The name of "Faith" is an obvious allegory in the tale that plays a main role either at the literal or at the symbolic level. This newlywed with "Faith" for three months, tells himself that one night of diabolic entertainment would be enough to satisfy his curiosity and afterward he will come back and "cling to [Faith's] skirts and follow her to Heaven (225). But his devilish fellow traveler gives him familiar details and shows him some prominent people that Brown considered "good Christians" and they are not as such. Brown then commences to doubt, and he wants to come back: "'Friend," said he, stubbornly, "my mind is made up. Not another step will I budge on this errand" (230).

Spectral evidence makes its appearance in the plot, and these specters controlled by Satan in order to confuse Brown, are the images of Deacon Gookin, his teacher of catechism, and his own wife through one of her pink ribbons falling down from a cloud. Brown now thinks that everybody turns out to be hypocritical Puritans and seem to have covenanted with the devil. Goodman Brown sees and hears these specters as if they were real people, but the truth is that Satan is manipulating reality and tormenting him (Ronan 267). Hawthorne here makes a clear allusion to the issue of spectral evidence, taken as a valid proof by the magistrates in the Salem Witch Trials to convict the accused and despite Cotton Mather's preliminary warnings of trusting only in this preternatural evidence.

Faith's pink ribbon is a very powerful metonymic symbol in the story. To Ronan, the falling of the ribbon reveals Brown's lack of real faith (268). When a cloud appears over Brown's head and voices of some of the prominent Salemites are heard, the cloud moves away, and releases one of Faith's pink ribbons. To Darrel Abel the pink ribbon plays two parts within the story "by orienting the visible to the invisible world" (170). It also works as something equivocal with this double meaning (Abel 174) since Brown is unable to determine what is true or false due to the devil's spectral workings, this is an "agonizing dilemma of doubt" (Abel 175) although Faith's real purity is untouched.

The utterance “My Faith is gone!” (232) reminds Goodman Brown one remarkable thing: his Puritan belief was not so strong as he thought. “There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil! for to thee is this world given” (232). In this speech he is stating that not only has he lost his faith in Puritanism, but that these religious values have been transferred instead to Satan to whom the specter of Faith in the form of her pink ribbon and now himself, have covenanted (Ronan 268). To Goodman Brown, Faith is also corrupted as the rest of the people he sees in the form of specters, but this is only a product of Satan’s black magic to deceive him, since Faith is indeed at home, what asserts the idea that it is Goodman Brown’s faith which is corrupted and himself tempted by the devil, and not his wife, interpreting the “surface” level of the story.

All that Brown sees is manipulated by Satan through spectral evidence, as it happened with the witchcraft crisis at Salem. With the belief of spectral evidence as something real as Brown sees it, there is no way to be certain that any of the people he recognizes in the Sabbath are actually witches just in the same way as no human judge in 1692 could separate the guilty from the innocent in the real trials considering spectral evidence as a reliable proof (Ronan 272). Brown is probably dreaming —having a nightmare— or seeing specters awake that confuse him and make him unable to distinguish reality from fantasy.

To finish this chapter dedicated to “Young Goodman Brown,” I would like to underscore how Hawthorne indeed omits all the details referring to the executions, a series of events that he did not however exclude in “Alice Doane’s Appeal.” His narrator offers instead a short overview of how Brown’s life was after the trials and his subsequent journey or nightmare in the haunted forest. Brown’s life is presented as unhappy and gloom till his death, whose grave had “no hopeful verse” (269) inscribed upon it.

In conclusion, Hawthorne proves resentful and reproachful not only with all his ancestors and above all with the magistrate John Hathorne and his terrible decisions that led many people to their death, but he is also reproachful with the Mathers, to whom he blames on the catastrophic consequences of their influence in the Puritan population. He considers that instead of using their power to stop the trials and the accusations and promote religious values, they encouraged the magistrates —most of them friends and relatives of the Mathers— to go on with

this outrageous event, and this way, they all forgot Christian charity becoming “more conscious of the secret guilt of others” (236).

8. *The Scarlet Letter* (1850): The “Black Man” and the Sin of Adultery



Fig. 4. Hugues Merle. *The Scarlet Letter*, 1861, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore MD. Retrieved from <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/25737/the-scarlet-letter/>

measuring of the historical, religious, literary and emotional distance that separated the Puritan New England of the past from the transcendentalist New England of the present” (145).

The Scarlet Letter emerged in Hawthorne’s imagination when he was working at the Custom House in Boston and found a piece of cloth and some private documents signed by Mr. Surveyor Pue about one Hester Prynne. In “The Custom House,” which is precisely the title of the introductory chapter of this romance, Hawthorne carefully explains some details of these papers about this woman and the thing that most called his attention: the piece of red cloth with the letter A:

But the object that most drew my attention to the mysterious package was a certain affair of fine red cloth, much worn and faded. There were traces about it of gold embroidery, ... the glitter was left. It had been wrought, as was easy to perceive, with wonderful skill of needlework; ... This rag of scarlet cloth—for time, and wear, and a sacrilegious moth, had reduced it to little other than a rag— on careful examination, assumed the shape of a letter. It was the capital letter A. (23)

After this description, Hawthorne admits that he tried to guess what this letter meant and then he had the idea to put the cloth on his breast, experiencing in that moment a “supernatural feeling” that he explains “as of burning heat; and as if the letter were not of red cloth, but red-hot iron. I shuddered, and involuntarily let it fall upon the floor” (24). Together with this mysterious cloth, there were some papers about “the life and conversation” (24) with Hester Prynne, who appeared to be a prominent personage in early New England, and Hawthorne gives credit and authenticity to the whole issue while asserting besides that the papers were still in his possession:

I found the record of other doings and sufferings of this singular woman, for most of which the reader is referred to the story entitled ‘The Scarlet Letter’ and it should be borne carefully in mind that the main facts of that story are authorized and authenticated by the document of Mr. Surveyor Pue. (24–25)

Robin DeRosa cites in her book what this letter inscribed in the bosom of a woman’s attire meant to the Puritans. The explanation is found in a Bill passed in December 1692 “against Conjurat[i]on, Witchcraft and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits” (qtd. in DeRosa 48), in which it is explained that the convicted witches after confessing their offences, the “said offence shall be written in Capitall Letters & placed upon the breast of said offender” (qtd. in DeRosa 48).⁴ Consequently, Hawthorne makes reference again to historical real facts to create his fiction and his characters, in this case, his first long narrative and his first success as a “romancer.”

Since this fiction is set in the colonial Boston of the seventeenth century, around the 1640s and before the Witchcraft delusion at Salem in 1692, *The Scarlet Letter* may be considered as a “prequel” and a premonition of the famous witch hunt and a case in point of how Puritan society reacted against the indecorous behavior of a woman, and all those to whom they considered were tempted by devilish spirits.

To Emerson W. Baker, Hester Prynne, “confronts Puritan self-righteousness and hypocrisy” being one of his “great fictional heroines” (268). Although a “fictional heroine” created by Hawthorne, we have just seen that Hester Prynne was a real woman around whom the author “embroiders” a female

⁴ Mass. Archives, Vol. 135, No. 68–69; reproduced in Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Papers*, 886.

character confronting the patriarchal society of her time as he probably imagined her after coming across Mr. Surveyor Pue's documents at the Custom House.

Being condemned to forever have inscribed in her attire the letter "A" on her bosom, Hester is not the only "perpetrator" of a supposed fleshly sin, in which a Puritan Minister called Arthur Dimmesdale also takes part. Hester is the victim of a Puritanical society that hypocritically condemned those who dared to defy their pious, strict moral rules. Hester refuses to reveal the name of her daughter's father. Consequently, she is imprisoned and then submitted to public scorn once she gives birth and is released from prison.

Hester and Dimmesdale's "passionate" affair happens in the belief that Hester's husband, Roger Chillingworth, is dead due to his capture by the Indians. However, not only is Chillingworth still alive, but he also has adopted several Native Indian customs and magic powers with which he tries to destroy Dimmesdale's life by consuming his health with strange magical remedies. This spiteful man, full of evil and hatred towards Hester and the Minister, seeks revenge and punishment for both his wife and Dimmesdale.

Chillingworth justifies that these practices are in fact his "old studies in alchemy" (54). As a physician, and under the excuse to help Dimmesdale with his ministrations, he little by little devours the Minister's physical and spiritual health. Within the plot, Chillingworth acquires a condition much more alike to the devil than any other character, directly compared to the "Black Man." His sin of revenge and his alchemist preparations to provoke Dimmesdale's illness and death is treated by Hawthorne as a much worse sin than Hester and Dimmesdale's.

In his introduction to the Wordsworth Classics edition of *The Scarlet Letter* (1999), Henry Claridge mentions this satanic feature in Chillingworth, "described in demonic terms" by the narrator (XIII). Claridge also references "Ethan Brand," another of Hawthorne's tales, analyzed above, to refer to Chillingworth and "the Unpardonable Sin," and to relate both characters as very similar in this regard: "his science is that of homeopathic medicine," a man of science who shows that his intellect is completely separated from his heart (XIII).

Pearl, the child fruit of their mutual sin, deserves careful attention. Not only has this girl a symbolic purpose being she the means through representing the

adulterous relationship between her parents and their sin, but she also acts as a curative element that empathizes with her parents in a too mature way for a very young child like her with a magic, miraculous power. Pearl seems to understand her mother's suffering and she also connects to her tormented father, the Minister Dimmesdale, in a preternatural way that finally leads him to redemption in the last chapter of the book. In an interesting study carried out by Anne Marie McNamara, the character of Pearl is deeply analyzed and discussed in the terms explained above. McNamara states that Pearl is more than a passive symbol of their mutual sin (537). Instead, she considers that "Pearl is a spirit child," and "elf-child" that "causes a transformation in the realm of the spirit" (538). Pearl is not a common seven-year-old girl, but she is also witty and wise, possessing a double character, natural and preternatural, and that with her curious mind, she sometimes tortures her mother "with misgivings of her natural origin ..." and "an uncanny curiosity concerning Hester's scarlet letter" (539).

Hawthorne inserts a secondary character in the novel who is treated as a witch, based on a real person, Mistress Hibbins. This character is supposed to be a real historical victim, Ann Hibbins, condemned and executed for witchcraft by the Salem magistrates; in other words, by Hawthorne's great-grandfather, John Hathorne. As in "Young Goodman Brown," the tormented Hawthorne is again using the names of real people accused of witches by his Puritan forefather. In the journal article entitled "Hawthorne's Feminine Voices: Reading *The Scarlet Letter* as a Woman" Suzan Last deals with the character of Mistress Hibbins from a feminist perspective and points out that her presentations "shatter stereotypes but in a much different way from those used to portray Hester and Pearl" (367).

Not only did *The Scarlet Letter* give Hawthorne the desired success and recognition that himself was searching for over his early years, but this first romance became a classic of the American literary renaissance of the nineteenth century, and it might be considered one of the first novels with a historical background which served to pave the way to other historical fictions related to Puritanism and witchcraft.

9. Symbolism of the Dark Forest in “Young Goodman Brown” and *The Scarlet Letter*

Fifteen years had passed since Hawthorne wrote and published “Young Goodman Brown” when he composed his first and one of his most acclaimed and studied romances as seen above. The fact that in *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne explores again the issue of witchcraft and the stiffness of Puritan values and he places the story once more in the 1600s, cannot be overlooked, resembling his ambivalent and tormented mind. Rereading and analyzing carefully both works, some connections can be seen and one of the most striking is the symbolism of the realms of the dark forest. In *The Scarlet Letter*, we find a sinister forest representative of Hester and Dimmesdale’s sin in chapters XVI, XVII, XVIII, and XIX, very similar to that one of Goodman Brown’s terrible errand and his encounter with the devil. In this forest scene in *The Scarlet Letter*, the symbolism concerning Satan or the “Black Man” as Pearl names it, is quite meaningful. Furthermore, in “Young Goodman Brown” we saw the dark forest as an allegory that stands for Brown’s “evil” and sinful soul, and in *The Scarlet Letter* we may perceive something similar with Hester and Dimmesdale, as the forest may represent both the “Edenic paradise” to secretly meet each other, but also, in Puritan terms, their “dark” and “sinful” minds. The symbolism of the forest was also associated with the Natives or “Red Men” as Hawthorne names them in “Main Street.” The wilderness of the woods was seen by Puritans as a threatening realm since the Natives’ connection with nature was so strong and an unknown place full of dangers for the Puritan settlers.

Despite the meeting in the forest between Hester and Dimmesdale at first sight does not have the obscure taints that had the reunion between the “fellow traveler” and Goodman Brown, this sequence in the novel is reminiscent of the darkness of their mutual sin. The moment is in fact very tense and weird because of Pearl’s role between both her parents. The scene of the forest is hence opaque and obscure as it is “a hard text,” in Millicent Bell’s words (22). The role of Pearl in this scene is indeed rather significant, since it is Pearl who leads the whole plot with her questions and gestures towards her mother and Dimmesdale, her “secret” father, that she seems actually to know. Pearl says that the Black Man—the devil— “haunts this forest and carries a book with him” (139). This is in fact

the Devil's Book, also named by some of the afflicted and accused witches at Salem that confessed this "spectral act" of Satan when they were questioned by the magistrates of the court of Oyer and Terminer (Norton 52). The signature of the Devil's Book was another of the main arguments during the trials to treat as a "proof" of the existence of the devil and the cause of the fits with which the "Afflicted Girls" were supposedly tormented when they were "forced" by the witches to sign it.

Goodman Brown is immersed and trapped in the darkness of the forest, perhaps a metaphor that resembles the darkness of his soul and his false conversion, as well as Hester and Pearl immerse themselves in the dark forest to meet Dimmesdale, the man to whom Hester has committed the adulterous sin also resembling that part of darkness of both souls of sinners with the fruit of their sin present there: Pearl. The dark forest is then a metaphor for the sinful minds and psyche of Goodman Brown, Hester, and Dimmesdale.

Furthermore, Hawthorne's vision on Nature was not so "happy" as the image his Transcendentalists friends Emerson and Thoreau had of it. To them, human beings were connected to Nature in harmony. But, as a dark romantic, Hawthorne saw natural landscapes as something impenetrable and obscure as the human mind; something mysterious, evil, and dangerous, and not in harmony at all. Hawthorne represents in this pessimistic way the natural and invisible world of the psyche, very often with gothic and dreadful connotations as in these two stories; nothing to do with the optimistic and balanced perspective of his Transcendentalist friends.

10. The Haunted House. *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851)

I have opened the general introduction to this paper with an excerpt from *The House of the Seven Gables* in which I already introduce Hawthorne's obsession with his family past and his hometown's regarding the witchcraft delusion. We now come back again to this long narrative to explore more deeply the ghosts and witches of the past, and how Puritan sin and hereditary guilt are transmitted throughout generations. As Ruland and Bradbury point out, *The House of the Seven Gables* "deals with contemporary experience and the demands of history"

(153), and I would add that with the hope of how that the “spell” and bad omens can be broken through love and forgiveness.

After two centuries of rivalry and fights for the land, with an execution for witchcraft, and with the “Native American Question” of the “Red Men” as background, the characters of this generational story, the Pyncheons and the Maules, make finally amends through the union of their youngest relatives. As Emerson W. Baker puts it, *The House of the Seven Gables* “may represent [to Hawthorne] an attempt to exorcise family demons” (270).

As could not be otherwise in Hawthorne’s fiction, there are numerous connections between historical vs fictional characters, family bonds, and religious conflicts that once more he intermingles in a web that is used to create his fictional milieu, in a realm where the “spectral” and the real converge. It is not a coincidence the name of the man executed for witchcraft in Hawthorne’s narrative, Mathew Maule. In fact, in the Salem of the seventeenth century, there was a merchant called Thomas Maule who, with no surprise either, was a fervent opponent of the witch trials, and, this is the remarkable point: he was a Quaker who previously had been a persecuted Anglican in England and was forced to servitude in the Caribbean during the English Civil War and subsequent Oliver Cromwell’s Puritan Protectorate (Baker 213). No wonder that his outspoken nature brought him so much trouble. He, like Ann Coleman, was also whipped several times, one of them for saying that Salem minister John Higginson “preached lies, and that his instruction was the doctrine of devils” (qtd. in Baker 214).

In 1695, Thomas Maule wrote and had published outside Massachusetts,⁵ *Truth Held Forth and Maintained According to the Testimony of the Holy Prophets Christ and His Apostles Recorded in the Holy Scriptures*, which was a defense of the theological basis of Quakerism and a denunciation of Massachusetts Puritan practices against them. Maule overtly criticized Puritan doctrine and asserted that the witch trials was a God’s punishment to the Massachusetts Bay for its sin and its persecution to Quakers (Baker 216).

⁵ This kind of dissenting writings against Puritan doctrines were not allowed to be published in the Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Even though few stories of Salem mention the involvement and participation of Thomas Maule, it is almost sure that Hawthorne had him in his mind when he composed this romance. Yet, as we will see, he changes this Quaker real man for a Puritan one convicted and executed for being a wizard, Mathew Maule, whose execution was ordered by Old Colonel Jaffrey Pyncheon. Moreover, in the character of Jaffrey Pyncheon there is another connection with a real personage: Captain John Turner, a merchant who was part of the jury that condemned Thomas Maule to be whipped. He was the proprietor of a Salem waterfront mansion, later called “House of the Seven Gables” (Baker 217).

Therefore, although Hawthorne does not give a specific location for the story, only “a by-street of one of our New England towns” (11), it does not seem a coincidence that this is the house mentioned above that first belonged to the merchant John Turner in the period of the witchcraft crisis, and later belonged to Hawthorne’s first cousin, Susanna Ingersoll. The house in question is found in what is now 115 of Derby Street, in Salem, Massachusetts.



Fig. 5. Highsmith, Carol M, photographer. *House of the Seven Gables*, Salem, MA. [Between 1980 and 2006] Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/2011630230/>.

The novel opens precisely in the period of the witch trials, and in the narrative, this old mansion was built for Colonel Old Pyncheon and his family after the trials by a descendant of the executed Mathew Maule. However, since the beginning of

its construction, the house is cursed, probably by Old Mathew Maule in the moment of his execution when he shouts at his prosecutor, Colonel Pyncheon, that God was going to give him “blood to drink” (14). This phrase is told by Maule

in the moment of his execution once more not by coincidence—as nothing in Hawthorne’s fiction—. Although Hawthorne puts these words in the mouth of Old Mathew Maule before being hanged, according to the records of the trials, it was Sarah Good who said this to her executors before dying as Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissembaum gather in their accounts of the Salem Witch Trials compiled in the book *Salem Possessed*, 1974 (8).

This curse uttered by Old Mathew Maule then turns into a kind of prophesy for many generations of the family, starting with own Colonel Pyncheon’s mysterious death in his chamber the same day that the house was going to be inaugurated in a party given for all the prominent people of the town.

Hence, to this extent, we know that although in his Preface Hawthorne declares that these characters are “the author’s own making” (10), there are many similarities between the fictional characters of this romance and real people. Colonel Jaffrey Pyncheon suspectedly enough resembles Captain John Turner, the first proprietor of the house. In another turn of Hawthorne’s tormented mind, Pyncheon could also resemble the judge John Hathorne, his great grandfather. And Mathew Maule, in addition to the Quaker Thomas Maule and uttering Sarah Good’s real words, may also resemble the husband of one of the women accused of witchcraft whom with Pyncheon—or Hathorne— was extraordinary severe casting a kind of spell on him.

This detail of the angry husband is found in George Parsons Lathrop’s “Introduction” to *The House of the Seven Gables*—signed as G.P.L.— and in which he points out that the outraged husband declared that God would punish all his wife’s persecutors (4). This “real” recorded curse is one of the major themes of the narrative, since during generations the Pyncheons and their mansion are doomed.

10.1 The Power of Mesmerism in *The House of the Seven Gables*

The romance is quite descriptive regarding the house and the characters, full of details, as most of Hawthorne’s work. The climax and one of the most interesting chapters is Chapter XIII, entitled “Alice Pyncheon.” I am almost sure that the number of the chapter is by no means a coincidence either. This chapter revolves around the mesmeric powers that the carpenter Mathew Maule, the grandson of

the executed wizard Old Mathew Maule, exerts over the disgraced young woman two generations after the Pyncheons and their house were cursed by his executed grandfather. In this chapter the young descendants of these two families take part in the plot as well: Holgrave and Phoebe. The daguerrotypist Holgrave, who turns out to be a descendant of Old Maule, reads a manuscript to Phoebe with this “mesmerizing” story about his ancestor Maule and poor Alice. By telling the story, Holgrave is at the same time mesmerizing Phoebe Pyncheon with the reading of this manuscript, according to which Maule manages to control “poor” Alice Pyncheon’s mind to such extent that she finally dies increasing the hatred and resentment between the two families. Nevertheless, Holgrave is not willing to continue with this rivalry and serves as a means for “breaking the spell” in the present times through his union with Phoebe.

Robin DeRosa sees in Holgrave a mirror for Hawthorne. Holgrave is a direct descendant of the participants of the trials, like Hawthorne. Holgrave’s ancestor is a victim while Hawthorne’s is a judge. Moreover, Holgrave is an artist—a daguerrotypist—and Hawthorne is a writer, another artist in a different way though (107). Hawthorne mesmerizes the reader with his writing as Holgrave mesmerizes Phoebe by retelling the sad story of her ancestor in the manuscript: Alice Pyncheon. Moreover, according to DeRosa, Holgrave’s name is like a pun and plays a symbolic role. Holgrave is a “whole” grave because his rational personality is more in accordance with telling the truth rather than with supernatural powers. His revelation of his real ancestry at the end of the story functions as the final truth and resolution of the conflict (107–08). I would add that Holgrave could also mean “hole” grave, since his real identity is mysterious as a deep, dark hole—or grave—until the end.

The power of mesmerism that these characters possess in *The House of the Seven Gables* is not new in Hawthorne’s literary work though, since these mesmeric or hypnotic powers are also present in his own writing style as well as in other of his “villains” apart from Maule, such as Chillingworth, Rapaccini, or Ethan Brand.

Samuel Chase Coale contends that “(i)n Hawthorne’s fiction, characters examine others with their powerful mesmerizing gazes” (49). That is true in the sense that even though Hawthorne despised this kind of “supernatural powers”

and considered an aberration to use hypnosis in order to enter people's minds, he provides many of his most "evil" characters with these mesmeric powers and the influence they exert over the people they want to control, destroy, or simply manipulate.

Coale also highlights this issue regarding Hawthorne's writing style and that:

(...) the texts themselves, partake of much mesmeric methods as the induction into and transition toward the trance or hypnotic state. Hawthorne lures the reader into his darker realm by setting his scene and then describing it hypnotically by using repetitive clauses and eerie images. (66–67)

Furthermore, Coale manifests that Hawthorne uses such long clauses and repetitions in the opening paragraphs of *The House*, turning the reading into a "linguistic spell" (67).

But, coming back to the plot of the romance and the way Hawthorne introduces us in the realms of the dark trance of this haunted and mesmeric story, the description of the mesmeric powers of all the Maules in the mentioned chapter XIII is rather "haunting" as well as the house. Again, Hawthorne's description of this fictional character and other real participants in the history of his hometown is highly persuasive and hypnotic, and once more, he returns to the theme of the witchcraft crisis of 1692 at Salem and the mentioning of some of the participants in the delusion:

He was the grandson of a former Matthew Maule, one of the early settlers of the town, and who had been a famous and terrible wizard in his day. This old reprobate was one of the sufferers when Cotton Mather, and his brother ministers, and the learned judges, and other wise men, and Sir William Phipps, the sagacious governor, made such laudable efforts to weaken the great enemy of souls, by sending a multitude of his adherents up the rocky pathway of Gallows Hill. (166)

It is worth noting the ironic tone with which he refers to all the participants including the own Mathew Maule: "a famous and terrible wizard" (166) in reference to Old Maule, "other wise men" alluding to the involved ministers and other prominent people of the colony, and "Sir William Phips, the sagacious governor" (166). Hawthorne spares no one in this romance, as he did in his previous literary works, positioning himself always on the side of the victims of Puritan intolerance. Cotton Mather and "his brother ministers" (166) also come out badly.

10.2 A Happy Ending for Sophia Peabody Hawthorne

Yet, despite all the generational tragedy for the two families lived in this narrative, contrariwise to *The Scarlet Letter*, this story has a happy ending with the breakdown of the curse through the union of the long-time rivals, the Pyncheons and the Maules by means of Phoebe and Holgrave's marriage. The divine justice is done with the recovery of the status of the family, Hepzibah and her brother Clifford Pyncheon's sanity, lost many years ago due to a wicked family matter provoked by evil Jaffrey, —maybe a metonymy for Satan— and the complete joy with the subsequent recovery of the Pyncheons' possessions in Maine after the death of the last Jaffrey Pyncheon in the present, in the same strange circumstances as well as his ancestor old colonel Pyncheon died in the haunted house. Hawthorne does not give any rational explanation to these mysterious deaths and keeps them in the realm of the supernatural haunted house.

The happy ending with the marriage between Holgrave and Phoebe was in fact a wish that Sophia Peabody Hawthorne made to her husband after feeling terribly sad when he read to her *The Scarlet Letter* and ended up having a “grievous headache” (qtd. in Bloom 221). In an extract contained in a letter from 1851 published in Harold Bloom's volume, Sophia herself declares after her husband read to her *The House of the Seven Gables* that “There is unspeakable grace and beauty in the Conclusion.”⁶

But many other critics of the period did not totally agree with this happy ending, such as E.P Whipple, who considers the love between Holgrave and Phoebe “implausible” (qtd. in Bloom 221) because of their own characters and family circumstances and Henry James, who found the novel “fragmentary” (qtd. in Bloom 221).

All in all, this second long narrative by Hawthorne was considered by himself a better work than *The Scarlet Letter*, something that he wrote to Horatio Bridge in 1851 when *The House of the Seven Gables* was first published and George Parsons Lathrop reproduces in his introduction to the novel (7).⁷ *The*

⁶ Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, Letter (January 27, 1851), cited in Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*, 1884, Vol. 1, p. 383. See Bloom, 222.

⁷ “The House of the Seven Gables’ in my opinion, is better than ‘The Scarlet Letter:’ but I should not wonder if I had refined upon the principal character a little too much for popular appreciation, nor if the romance of the book should be

House of the Seven Gables enjoyed much popularity in its time and nowadays it is regarded as the work by an American author that most has to do with Salem and its witchcraft episode.



Fig. 6. Bela Lyon Pratt *Nathaniel Hawthorne Statue*, 1925. Salem, MA. Photograph by AlexiusHoratius. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hawthorne_Statue_Salem.JPG

11. Conclusions

Having reached this point in this thought-provoking study about Hawthorne, his dark and tormented mind and his ambivalent religious faith, we can conclude that he was indeed “bewitched,” entrapped by the hereditary guilt described in *The House of the Seven Gables*, embarrassed due to his forefathers own “Puritan” sins prosecuting and executing people as showed in “Young Goodman Brown,” “Main Street,” “Alice Doane’s Appeal,” and *The Scarlet Letter*, and sometimes ashamed about his own literary works

as exposed in “The Devil in Manuscript” or in the first romance *Fanshawe* written during his college years and that he rejected afterward. He also represented the polarities and extremes of the early American society and his own mind in “The May-pole of Merry Mount.” Many of his works remained unfinished and unpublished, such as *The Seven Tales of My Native Land* and other of his writings were published posthumously by his wife and son like *Passages from the American Notebooks* and his letters.

Henry James said about Hawthorne that he was “the most valuable example of American genius” (qtd. in Baym 369) and undoubtedly was one of the most significant literary exponents of the antebellum period in the United States (Baym 369).

somewhat at odds with the humble and familiar scenery in which I invest it. But I feel that portions of it are as good as anything I can hope to write, and the publisher speaks encouragingly of its success.” (qtd. in Lathrop 7)

Another conclusion that we might reach after reviewing his tales and long narratives is that his imagination and creativity was ambivalent and conflictive as well as his religious faith, and that the multiple interpretations that readers may extract from his fiction are in fact “a form of self-expression” in Nina Baym’s terms (370). The dichotomy between heart and intellect explored in “Ethan Brand” and in the devilish character of Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* is also another of his internal conflicts.

Hawthorne’s vivid characterization of his female characters is another point to take into consideration here as a conclusion. In spite of his being considered scornful with the women writers of his generation due to his comments about “the damned mob of scribbling women” (qtd. in Gibert 217), it is also true that not many other male writers of the nineteenth century were able to highlight the damage that patriarchal values could do to women (Baym 372) as Hawthorne did, and as we have seen with his most famous heroine, Hester Prynne, or Hepzibah and Phoebe Pyncheon, who are accurately portrayed in their respective periods and with all the obstacles that they found in the male-oriented society of their time.

Finally, I will cite again Emerson W. Baker, when he agrees that, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the Salem native, “reminded readers of the dark side of that past” alluding to the witchcraft delusion; and that there is “no (other) figure (that) played a larger role in establishing Salem’s place in the American imagination” (268).

My conclusion develops from these very same words by Baker. Nathaniel Hawthorne is unarguably the author of fiction who most masterfully knew how to blend history, family, and supernatural phenomena in his literature. Being in addition a Salemite with a Puritan past and a Unitarian/Transcendentalist present in which he lived no void of internal religious and moral conflicts, he took well advantage of all these elements closely related and connected in his life and career. This way he could give subsequent generations much food for thought to rewrite and rediscover the early American past and its origins and how they affected to the present and future of the American nation.

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