

The VICTORIAN AGE

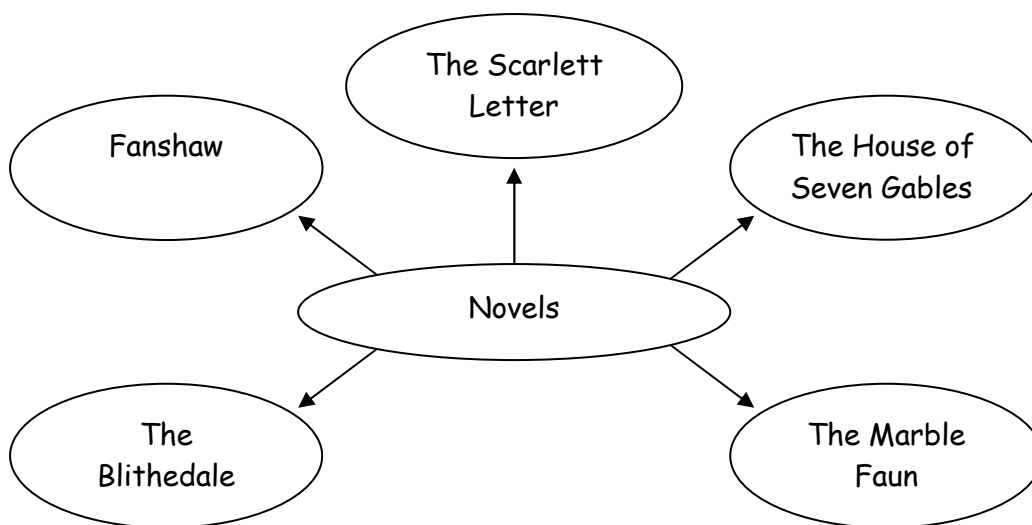
Nathaniel Hawthorne

Biography

- Born on July 4, 1804.
- attends Bowdoin College at the expense of an uncle.
- meets transcendentalist intellectuals (Emerson, Thoreau)
- Married with Sophia Peabody in 1842: 3 daughters
- Friendship with Herman Melville
- famous novelist but not rich: works at the Boston + Salem Custom House
- A Democrat, lost his job with new presidential election of 1848.
- Died in Plymouth on May 19, 1864 for a stomach cancer

Writings

- among the first to experiment with alternate history.
- Romantic writer on : INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM, IMAGINATION, NATURE.



- A first collection of tales published anonymously on different magazines
- Well known tales: Rapaccini's Daughter and Tanglewood Tales.

The **Scarlet Letter** (1850)

- ✓ Hawthorne's masterpiece
- ✓ Historical Novel
- ✓ Based on a document found by the narrator (as in Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi*)
- ✓ Omniscient narrator.
- ✓ Set in the Puritan Boston of XVII century
- ✓ Main characters: Hester Prynne, Roger Chillingworth (not his true name), Reverend Dimmesdale, Pearl Prynne

Plot

- ✓ Hester Prynne, married with the lost Roger Chillingworth, gives birth to Pearl, but she is the result of an adultery.
- ✓ Hester is punished for her crime and is sent to the scaffold. She has the A letter on his breast, as a symbol of her SIN
- ✓ She does not want to reveal the identity of the father
- ✓ She is persecuted by the Puritan Elders of the town
- ✓ Her husband, made captive by the Indians, returns and wants to investigate on the identity of the real father
- ✓ The real father is Dimmesdale, tormented by his SIN
- ✓ Under Chillingworth's pression, the Revend confesses the misfact.

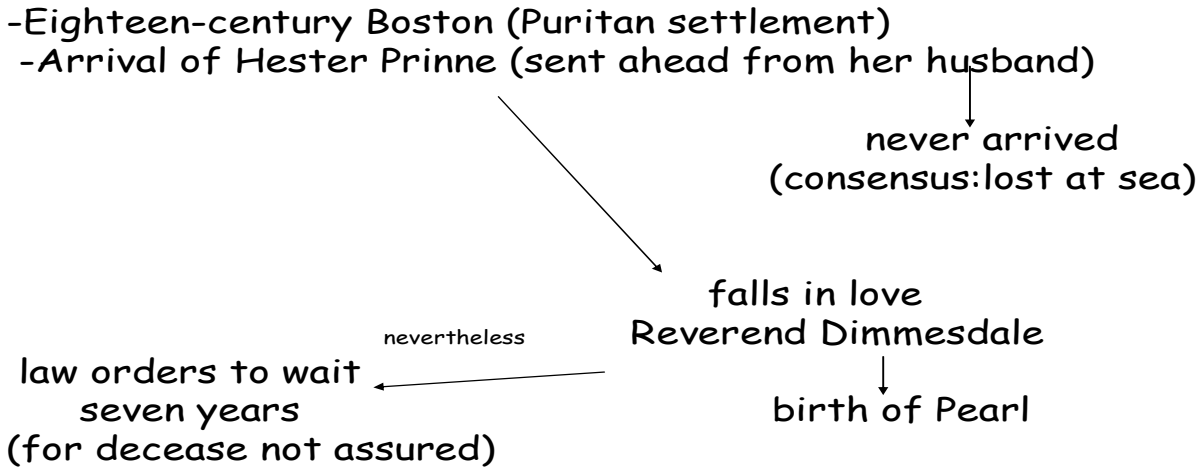
Recurrent Themes

SIN

- ✓ The scarlet letter is the symbol of her sin.
- ✓ Hester's and Dimmesdale's experience similar to Adam's and Eve's condition; for both sin results in expulsion and suffering but also in the knowledge of what it means to be human.
- ✓ In the Puritan age, the sin is seen as a threat to the community and it has to be punished
- ✓ Anyway sinfulness can lead to personal growth and understanding of others
- ✓ The positive side of the coin in represented by Pearl, Hester's daughter, which is the embodiment of the scarlet letter.

THE SCARLET LETTER

THE PLOT



-Hester refuses to confess

punished with laws of time:
condemned to *scaffold* + *show the Scarlet Letter*

-A little boy signals her passage

-Hester accused of heresy
-Return of Hester's husband
↓
reveals his true identity to no one but Hester
(swears to secrecy)

→ impish
-Pearl grows into child
→ willful

-Hester + Dimmesdale decide to flee Europe

→ discovers identity of Hester's lover
-Hester's husband
→ hears the plane
books passage on same ship

-Dimmesdale decides to confess..

