



Selected Tales and Sketches

Nathaniel Hawthorne , Michael J. Colacurcio

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The short fiction of a writer who helped to shape the course of American literature. With a determined commitment to the history of his native land, Nathaniel Hawthorne revealed, more incisively than any writer of his generation, the nature of a distinctly American consciousness. The pieces collected here deal with essentially American matters: the Puritan past, the Indians, the Revolution. But Hawthorne was highly - often wickedly - unorthodox in his account of life in early America, and his precisely constructed plots quickly engage the reader's imagination. Written in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s, these works are informed by themes that reappear in Hawthorne's longer works: *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. And, as Michael J. Colacurcio points out in his excellent introduction, they are themes that are now deeply embedded in the American literary tradition.

Selected Tales and Sketches Details

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Daniel Walden says

I think Hawthorne wrote some of the best short stories of all time. Some are, but many are.

Walt says

Hawthorne would fit right in with today's quirky television. I envision him writing for something strange like THE OFFICE. His writing makes me recognize how much language has changed from his time to ours. It is an attestation to evolution if nothing else is. I enjoyed the eerie sense of the stories --- some more than others. If you want a sense of early American language and storytelling, this is it.

Jeff Hobbs says

Read so far:

The Gray champion --2
Sunday at home --
The Minister's black veil --2
The Maypole of Merry Mount --
Mr. Higginbotham's catastrophe --
Wakefield --
The Prophetic pictures --
The Hollow of the three hills --
Dr. Heidegger's experiment --
Legends of the province-house : Howe's masquerade --
Edward Randolph's portrait --
Lady Eleanore's mantle --
Old Esther Dudley --
The Haunted mind --
The Ambitious guest --
Night sketches --
Endicott and the Red Cross --
The Birthmark --
Young Goodman Brown --
Rappaccini's daughter --
The Hall of fantasy --
The Celestial railroad --
Feathertop : a moralized legend --3
Egotism ; or, The Bosom-serpent --
The Christmas banquet --
Roger Malvin's burial --
Earth's holocaust --

Passages from a relinquished work --
The Artist of the beautiful --
The Snow image --
The Great stone face --
Ethan Brand --
The Man of Adamant --
The Wives of the Dead --
My kinsman, Major Molineux --
Alice Doane's appeal --
Mrs. Hutchinson --
Sir William Phips --
Notch of the White Mountains --

Kevin says

One of the first books I read in college. It is one that I've read countless times since. There are so many great short stories here that I can't pick one as a favorite. Much of Hawthorne's work takes place during early American history, using the Puritan faith as a model to build many of his characters. All of the stories included take you to that time with page-turning suspense that keeps you engrossed for hours.

John Lucy says

If for no other reason than that you get a whole lot of Hawthorne wrapped up in this collection, it rocks. Most of Hawthorne's writing career was in writing what he called tales and sketches (what we might today just call short stories). Essentially, then, with the diversity of the selection in this collection, you get the full range of Hawthorne's interest and skill. Regardless of whether or not you like Hawthorne I suggest picking up this collection, to have as a reference at least--a reference to the American author that, more than any other skilled American author, wrote about the people and places of this fine country. I hate people who say that Hawthorne is good reading only as a critic of the culture and country of the States; I mean only that he included an incredible amount of American history, culture, and landmarks in his writing.

All the well-known and favorite stories of Hawthorne are here from, I think, all of his publications: Young Goodman Brown, Alice Doane's Appeal, The Ambitious Guest, The Celestial Railroad, Rappacini's Daughter, The Bosom-Serpent, and others. It's a long and great selection of pieces.

The introduction to this collection is worth reading, too. It's an introduction, which are never anything terribly special, but as far as introductions go, Hawthorne deserves an introduction. Hawthorne is so misunderstood, or not understood in any fashion, and under-read that any introduction would suffice as a good one. I don't particularly agree with the introduction that Penguin provides here but, again, it's a fair introduction worth reading.

Nils Samuels says

The first great American writer of fiction, working in the form that serves him best, with quick, moody,

impressionistic tales that tap into and benchmark American romanticism for all the years after. =The Scarlet Letter= may be better known, but Hawthorne's atmospherics wear out in longer narratives. "The Artist of the Beautiful," "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," and "The Minister's Black Veil" stand out.

David Allen says

Hawthorne, one of the first great American authors, sought to document its feel and attitudes, especially the Puritans', in his fiction and descriptive sketches. If you can accept his allegorical style, you'll appreciate his depth. While I'm not displeased to have read this 440-page book in its entirety, it's more Hawthorne than is strictly necessary. And the editor's 40-page introduction, while erudite, could have been employed against accused Salem witches as torture.

John Kenworthy says

Everything I know about literary criticism was learned in an amazing class on American Lit I took at the University of Colorado back in the 80s. The class itself was not so stunning. The teacher - if you can call him that - was an unenthusiastic resident assistant, and most of my classmates were bored beyond belief. They gorged themselves on Cliff Notes and Monarch Notes and tried to find the sycophantic path that the teacher was seeking from his bleary-eyed sheep.

The subject matter was standard American Lit stuff... and a large portion of it was Hawthorne. I had never really encountered his writing before, but I instantly loved it. What I loved more were the discussions lead by a rebellious class mate of mine named Amy Redford - daughter of Robert and now a brilliant filmmaker herself (The Guitar) - who passionately dissected the themes, and styles, and sheer technical writing with the most incredible display of literary acumen I have ever witnessed.

With my input from one side of the room and Amy's even more insightful commentary on the other - we unleashed a cataclysm of insight upon the great American authors - particularly Hawthorne. The teacher and our classmates knew not what hit them. For all of our deconstruction/reconstruction of the texts, the great Hawthorne's work not only survived but thrived within our oh-so-opinionated young minds.

Story by story we constantly uplifted the brilliance of the writer - and absolutely devoured his work: May Pole, Goodman Brown, the Minister's Black Veil - and particularly Rappaccini's Daughter among others. These discussions enabled the works to come alive to me and continue to do so to this day.

Regardless of our jaded contemporary ear for language, Hawthorne remains absolutely relevant and this is one of his greatest collections. For anyone who enjoys a good story - for any one who enjoys thrilling writing - this is a MUST READ. Hemingway, Twain, Steinbeck, Faulkner - sure - great American authors - but HAWTHORNE! Something a cut above.

And I have Amy Redford to thank for opening my eyes to that.

Carmen says

There is something about Hawthorne's stories that leave the reader so unsettled, the stories themselves being unsettled. The Artist of the Beautiful, Rappaccini's Daughter, The Birthmark, Roger Malvin's Burial - all are so carefully rendered, and somewhat formal, but there is an undercurrent of darkness and restriction, unbridled chaos so close to the surface, yet never addressed directly. The stories I've listed appealed to me the most, particularly The Birthmark, a story touching on female beauty and the pursuit of happiness, and how some of us are never satisfied. Like characters in Poe, Hawthorne's creations are the engineers of their own demise. Yet, I feel that with Hawthorne, he is more reluctant to have them fall, and this conflict arises at the intersection between individual obsessions or pursuits, and the communal good. Isn't the Artist of the Beautiful Hawthorne himself? And yet, the artist is doomed. Perhaps these are cautionary tales. And just as Hawthorne changed his name to distance himself from his Salem witch trial judge ancestors, his stories retain an air of judgment and law. Maybe, as his work illustrates, you can't escape your past...How beautiful the garden in Rappaccini's Daughter, or Owen Warland's mechanical butterfly fluttering around the sceptics, but does it rival nature? Perhaps the artist is good as long as he does not try to rival God, and maybe that is what Hawthorne is trying to do, he is showing that he knows his boundaries.

Jesse Ascunce says

Hawthorne is the coolest. His allegories are mind blowing in these short stories. He always seems to leave me with an eerie feeling when I finish his creepy stories. For some reason...I like that.

Tom Baker says

It has been at least 10 years since I read this. Hawthorne has always been honored as one of America's premier writers of the first half of the 19th century. I enjoyed most of the stories, particularly "Young Goodman Brown". His writing style, to me, seems more archaic than some of his contemporaries such as Melville. Perhaps, it is because he wrote mostly about the puritanical peoples of New England villages.

Peter Lindstrom says

I love reading Hawthorne even though I don't always like him & yes, even I find he can be dull at times, but there is much in there, so I've been reading & re-reading his stories most of my life. This collection is perhaps the best, good intro essay & generally Hawthorne at his best, with a few of the dull ones. "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" is worth reading to show how Hawthorne didn't cherish either the Puritans or his family's leadership in early Massachusetts.

Jess says

Most people only think of The Scarlet Letter when they think of Hawthorne, but his short stories are amazing!

Robin Sencenbach Ferguson says

A fine collection of Hawthorne's short stories and sketches. Hawthorne created an all new genre for himself--he was a writer who loved the idea of historical fiction but was also quintessentially American--so he created a series of historical fiction and allegory stories set in the early years of a very young country. It is through his writings that readers of literature (for better or worse) learn of the character of his Puritan forefathers and of the long-unsettled feelings against Mother England years before the Revolution. Hawthorne is an unquestionable cornerstone of American fiction.

His stories follow a series of themes--the power of guilt on the human mind, the importance of history in the lives of the American people, human nature's knack for wanting just exactly what it shouldn't have, and, of course, the darkness that lies in the depths of man's nature. Some are notably great ("Young Goodman Brown," "The Minister's Black Veil," "The Artist of the Beautiful), Some are not so much ("The Hall of Fantasy," "Alice Doane's Appeal"). And some are just weird ("Rappaccini's Daughter"). However, this set of short stories does show the range and depth of his work. Also look out for a couple moments when he makes fun of the transcendentalists (take that, Emerson).

If you enjoyed Hawthorne's novels (but would love something shorter--come on, admit it, we all struggled with "The Scarlet Letter"), I would recommend this collection of short stories.

Paul says

I had previously read selections from this book as part of a course called "The American Renaissance." The short story "Young Goodman Brown" was on several course syllabi during my college years, but I had never read more than four or five of Hawthorne's stories. (I've never read any of his novels.) I enjoyed the opportunity to read a broader selection of his work, and I think that I have a better understanding of the issues he's grappling with: the tarnished nature of the human soul, the destructive forces of scientific and philosophical overreach, the role of religion in Americans' lives.

Reading literature, I've found, is most fulfilling when done with others. The ability to discuss what one has read, especially with guidance from those who know much more about the context of the writings, adds an important dimension to what is otherwise a solitary experience. Still, there were moments when I actually laughed at lines from Hawthorne's stories, or was drawn with excitement to see what would happen.

This is a great collection for those who are interested in delving into the work of an important 19th century American author, even if you aren't doing it for class.
