

Nathaniel Hawthorne - Self-Publisher

Text excerpted and adapted from Nathaniel Hawthorne
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathaniel_Hawthorne)

Nathaniel Hawthorne (originally Nathaniel Hathorne) was born in Salem, Massachusetts, to Nathaniel Hathorne and the former Elizabeth Clarke Manning. His ancestors include John Hathorne, the only judge involved in the Salem witch trials who never repented of his actions. Nathaniel later added a "w" to make his name "Hawthorne" in order to hide this relation.

When Hawthorne was 16, he distributed to his family seven issues of a homemade newspaper he entitled "The Spectator," which was written by hand and included essays, poems, and news utilizing the young author's developing adolescent humor.

At the age of 24, Hawthorne self-published his first novel, "Fanshawe: A Tale," which he later tried to suppress, feeling that it was not equal to the standard of his later work. "Fanshawe" appeared anonymously in October 1828 from the Boston publishers Marsh and Capen. Its printing was paid for at the author's own expense, costing him \$100. The book was based on Hawthorne's experiences as a Bowdoin College student in the early 1820s.

"Fanshawe" generally received positive reviews. Sarah Josepha Hale, then editor of the "Ladies' Magazine," advised potential readers to buy the book rather than rely on finding it at a circulating library. As she wrote, "Purchase it, reader. There is but one volume, and trust me that it is worth placing in your library." William Leggett saw further potential in the young author: "The mind that produced this little, interesting volume is capable of making great and rich additions to our native literature."

The book, however, did not sell well. After its commercial failure, Hawthorne burned the unsold copies. Later, all the copies that could be obtained were destroyed.

A dozen years after Hawthorne's death, a copy was found, and the tale reissued by James O. & Co. The novel was so rare, and Hawthorne was so secretive about his early attempt at a novel that, after his death, his wife Sophia insisted that her husband had never written a novel with that title, despite being shown a copy.

Thought for the Month:

"Easy reading is damn hard writing. "

Nathaniel Hawthorne