The House of the Seven Gables Study Guide

The House of the Seven Gables by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Author Biography

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts on July 4, 1804 to an esteemed family headed by Nathaniel Hathorne and his wife, Elizabeth Manning (The author added the "W" to his name later in life). Hawthorne had two sisters (one older and one younger), and after his father's death of yellow fever in Surinam in 1808, the family lived for ten years with his mother's side of the family. Hawthorne and his immediate family lived in the third story of a house that was also home to his grandparents and eight unwed aunts and uncles. In 1818, his mother moved the family to Raymond, Maine, where they lived in the home that Hawthorne's Uncle Richard built in anticipation of making Maine the new center for the Manning family.

Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College and, following his graduation in 1825, returned to the Manning house in Salem to pursue his writing. In 1828, Hawthorne anonymously self-published his first novel, *Fanshawe*, which was a resounding failure. He remained in Salem until 1836, when he moved to Boston and worked as an editor of *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* and later as the editor of *Peter Parley's Universal History on the Basis of Geography*. In 1837, Hawthorne published his first collection of stories, *Twice-Told Tales*, which launched his literary career. In 1837, he also met his wife-to-be, Sophia Peabody. The couple married in 1842 and had three children: Una, Julian, and Rose.

Despite his growing notoriety, Hawthorne was forced to pursue alternative means of supporting his family. In 1842, he took his first political appointment with the Boston Customhouse. In 1846, Hawthorne became the surveyor of the Salem Customhouse. During this time, Hawthorne published his second book of stories, *Mosses from an Old Manse*. When Zachary Taylor took the presidency in 1849, Hawthorne lost his appointment in Salem and again turned to writing. He published *The Scarlet Letter*, one of his best-known novels, in 1850. The novel was a bestseller and was quickly followed by *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), which proved to be another success. In 1852, Hawthorne published *The Blithedale Romance*. When Franklin Pierce, Hawthorne's friend and former classmate at Bowdoin College, took the presidency in 1853, he appointed Hawthorne the consulship in Liverpool, England. Pierce failed to be reelected for another term; as a result, in 1857, Hawthorne lost the consulship in England. Hawthorne then moved to Italy for the next two years writing his final novel, *The Marble Faun*. He returned to the United States in 1860 and struggled with both his health and his writing. Hawthorne passed away in his sleep on May 19, 1864 while visiting Pierce in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

Plot Summary

Preface

The House of the Seven Gables begins with a preface in which Hawthorne makes a point to tell readers that the tale they are about to read is a "Romance" rather than a traditional "Novel." He proceeds to say that because the story is written as a Romance, it gives him creative license to present reader's with his selective understanding of the truth instead of binding him to being true to life. He notes that Romances give writers a creative and subjective license to "mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture." Hawthorne also tells readers that the moral purpose of his work is to convey the notion that "the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones." Despite this claim, however, he notes that he has not tried "to impale the story with its moral." Finally, Hawthorne concludes that he did not intend to correlate the location or events in the story with any particular place or happenings in the County of Essex.

I: The Old Pyncheon Family

The first chapter opens with a description of the House of the Seven Gables, its history, and that of the Pyncheon and Maule families. In the mid-1600s, Matthew Maule (the elder) settles in the County of Essex and establishes a homestead. Soon thereafter, Colonel Pyncheon decides he would like to build his familial estate on Matthew's land. Matthew refuses to surrender his land. He is then put on trial for witchcraft and with Colonel Pyncheon's full support, is hung. Just before dying, Matthew places a curse on Colonel Pyncheon, saying that "God will give him blood to drink." Colonel Pyncheon acquires the land, builds his house using Thomas Maule, Matthew Maule's son, as the architect. The day of his house-warming feast, to which he has invited the entire community, including many very esteemed society people, Colonel Pyncheon is found dead in his study with blood dripping from his mouth. Subsequent generations live in the house, believing that they are entitled to a large piece of land in Maine that Colonel Pyncheon was in the process of acquiring before he died. Many try to acquire the land, but fail.

More years pass, and thirty years before the beginning of the novel's action, another wealthy Pyncheon (Jaffrey Pyncheon, the elder) dies. His nephew (Clifford) is accused, tried, and convicted of the murder and is sentenced to life imprisonment. Jaffrey Pyncheon (the elder) believed that Matthew Maule was wrongly robbed of his land and put to death and intended to make restitution to the Maule descendents. Following Clifford's incarceration, Jaffrey Pyncheon's other nephew (Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon) inherits the dead man's wealth. Clifford's sister (Hepzibah) remained living in the House of the Seven Gables, per her uncle's will. Meanwhile, Maule's descendents have all but died out. They long inhabited the town and were a "quiet, honest, well-meaning race of

people, cherishing no malice done them," who were said to have the power to influence people's dreams.

The chapter concludes with a description of the giant elm tree in the yard, the flowers that grow between two of the gables, and the door on the front gable that leads to a once used retail space.

II: The Little Shop-Window

Hepzibah Pyncheon rises from bed, dresses, examines herself in the mirror, and pulls out a miniature (a very small portrait) of a young man, who readers later learn is her brother, Clifford. She cries as she readies herself for the day and notices how cross she looks as a result of the scowl caused by her near-sightedness. Despite her almost permanent scowl, Hepzibah is said to have a "heart that never frowned. It was naturally tender, [and] sensitive." Hepzibah faces the day in low spirits as she sets up the shop that she intends to open. Opening the shop is mortifying for her because she is an aristocrat by birth; however, she has no choice and must commence a business of her own in order to save herself from starvation. When she finally opens the shop door, she immediately runs inside the house to cry.

III: The First Customer

The first person to enter Hepzibah's shop is her boarder, Holgrave. The daguerreotypist comes to the store to offer Hepzibah help with her preparations. He congratulates Hepzibah on her endeavor, noting that this venture is a promising new beginning for her that will give her a "sense of healthy and natural effort for a purpose." Hepzibah views the situation quite differently and laments that she is no longer a lady. Holgrave counters that no Pyncheon lady has ever acted more heroically or nobly. Holgrave attempts to buy biscuits, but Hepzibah insists on giving them to him free. Holgrave departs and Hepzibah overhears two workmen discussing her shop. They discuss her disagreeable looks and the likely failure of her shop. As Hepzibah considers the possibility of failure, the shop-bell rings and a boy (Ned Higgins) enters. As with Holgrave, Hepzibah gives the child a gingerbread cookie for free. He shortly returns to request another cookie, for which Hepzibah takes his payment. Other customers follow and in several cases, Hepzibah does not stock their needs. At the end of the day, she has a poor opinion of the temperament and manners of people who she sees as part of the lower classes. At the same time, after seeing a wealthy lady pass by, she wonders about the purpose of such a person.

IV: A Day Behind the Counter

Toward the afternoon, a large, elderly gentleman (Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon) passes by the shop and gazes upon it with both a frown and a smile. When he sees Hepzibah his "smile changed from acrid and disagreeable to the sunniest complacency and benevolence." Hepzibah shows dislike for the man and draws a comparison between

his likeness and that of the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon, which hangs in the house. The shop bell rings when Uncle Venner enters the shop. He is the oldest resident of Pyncheon Street and is happy to see that Hepzibah has opened a shop instead of remaining idle. He discusses the possibility of his retirement to what he calls his farm. Although he praises Hepzibah for working, he tells her that it is an embarrassment that her wealthy cousin lets her do so. Hepzibah tells him that the judge is not to blame. Uncle Venner leaves Hepzibah after inquiring when Clifford will be home. Hepzibah is quite jarred by Uncle Venner's question and spends the remainder of the day dazed and clumsy. Just after she closes the shop for the day, an omnibus arrives, bringing Phoebe to Hepzibah's doorstep. Phoebe's letter was unfortunately delayed and thus her arrival is a surprise to Hepzibah, who decides that her country relation cannot stay lest she upset Clifford.

V: May and November

When Phoebe awakes in the morning, she arranges her quarters, "throwing a kindly and hospitable smile over the apartment." Her "sweet breath and happy thoughts" remove "all former evil and sorrow" from the room. Phoebe joins Hepzibah, who tells her that she unfortunately cannot stay. Unaffected by the comment, Phoebe assures Hepzibah that she will earn her keep and be a cheerful addition to the house. Hepzibah accedes and after telling Phoebe that Clifford is soon to arrive home, she fetches his miniature. Phoebe, who thought that Clifford was dead, admires the miniature, commenting on Clifford's sweet and childlike face. The two women sit down to tea, and when the shop-bell rings, Phoebe jumps up. To Hepzibah's great pleasure, Phoebe serves the customer with ease and skill. Despite her being a country girl, Phoebe is praised by the narrator for her lady-like qualities. Phoebe's presence is known in the town and inspires a steady stream of shop customers. Uncle Venner praises her and likens her to one of God's angels. Hepzibah talks at length to Phoebe about Alice Pycheon, who is believed to haunt the house and whose harpsichord Hepzibah had shown Phoebe earlier. Changing the subject, Hepzibah then tells Phoebe about Holgrave, the daguerreotypist with questionable politics who lives in one of the gables. Noting his strange hold on her mind and his agreeable and kind disposition, Hepzibah says that she is disinclined to send him away simply for his strange companions.

VI: Maule's Well

After having tea, Phoebe goes out to the garden, which she finds in a state of decay that has been only slightly modified by a small effort of evident care. While in the garden, she is happy to find flowers, vegetables, a robin's nest in a pear tree, a fountain, and a hen-coop. Within the hen-coop, she finds a rooster, two hens, and a chick, all having seen better days. Holgrave surprises Phoebe as he enters the garden. Holgrave notes the positive way the hens react to Phoebe, who approaches the conversation hesitantly. Holgrave tells Phoebe that he has been caring for the garden and offers to show her one of his daguerreotypes. He shows her one of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, and she mistakes it for Colonel Pyncheon. Holgrave continues the discussion by saying that

it has been impossible for him to create a pleasing rendering of the judge despite more than one attempt. Pictures apparently cannot cover up the truth of a man's character as a subjective painter might. Holgrave asks Phoebe if she would care to tend to the flowers and the hens while he cared for the vegetables. Although her reticence about Holgrave remains in tact, she complies with the request and weeds the flower-bed. As Holgrave leaves, he warns Phoebe not to drink or bathe in the fountain, which is called Maule's well, because the water is believed to be bewitched. Phoebe also goes inside and finds Hepzibah in the dark. Phoebe has a strange feeling that someone else is in the room with them, and after she goes off to bed, she continues to think that she hears Hepzibah talking with someone.

VII: The Guest

Phoebe awakes to find Hepzibah already busy in the kitchen attempting to find something savory to make for breakfast. Hepzibah purchases the best mackerel available from the passing fish-dealer. Phoebe assists by roasting coffee and making an Indian cake. Hepzibah is emotional during the preparations, laughing and crying. Phoebe is aware of Hepzibah's strange behavior and inquires what has happened to affect her so, when Hepzibah signals that "he" is coming to the table. Clifford arrives, looking elderly and spiritless. He weakly greets Phoebe, and Hepzibah explains that Phoebe is their cousin. The three sit down to eat, and Clifford notices how changed Hepzibah is and wonders if she is angry with him because of her scowl. Hepzibah assures him that she has nothing but love for him. He eats voraciously as the narrator continues to describe his disposition toward all that is beautiful. He is pleased with Phoebe's presence but cannot look at his sister because of her unattractiveness. Clifford enjoys the beautiful rose presented by Phoebe and remarks about the dismal house. When the shop-bell rings, Phoebe gets up to attend to the customer, and Hepzibah explains to her brother that they are now quite poor. She fears the disgrace she has brought to them by opening the shop; however, Clifford apologizes for his previous disapproval and bursts into tears. Shortly thereafter, he falls asleep, leaving Hepzibah to weep quietly as she looks at him.

VIII: The Pyncheon of To-Day

When Phoebe enters the shop, she finds Ned, the young boy who favors the shop's gingerbread cookies. Before leaving, Ned asks Phoebe how Clifford is. Phoebe learns through the inquiry that the man at breakfast is Hepzibah's brother. Just as the boy leaves, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon enters. He introduces himself and attempts to give Phoebe a kiss, which she instinctively rebuffs. He turns cold in response and then thinking better of it, warms again. She apologizes, yet is struck by the similarity between the judge and Colonel Pyncheon. Noticing her ill-ease, the judge asks if she is afraid of something. She tells him no and asks if he would like to see Hepzibah. He delays her and surmises that she fears Clifford. She assures him to the contrary and says that Clifford is not frightful in the least. He goes to enter the house just as Hepzibah comes out and prevents him from doing so. The judge offers Hepzibah anything he has to

make Clifford comfortable and asks to see him. Hepzibah refuses his request. The conversation escalates with the judge offering more and more and Hepzibah refusing everything. The two are interrupted by Clifford's cry to not let the judge enter the house. The judge is deeply angered and tells Hepzibah that when she and Clifford realize their injustice, he will simply hope that they will accept his generous offers. He leaves and, while Hepzibah laments his evil ways, Phoebe questions if he is truly ill intentioned. Phoebe goes off to tend to Clifford, confused by the events of the day and certain that Hepzibah's contempt for the judge is rooted deeply in the past.

IX: Clifford and Phoebe

Despite her ongoing attempts to care for Clifford, Hepzibah realizes that because she so horribly lacks the beauty he so adores, Phoebe is better equipped to tend to him. Clifford brightens in Phoebe's refreshing and purifying presence and although he does not act on it, he finds himself attracted to her. For her part, Phoebe is likely unaware of her impact on Clifford. She finds the mysteries of his past annoying and is brought down a bit by the heavy atmosphere. Nonetheless, she perseveres, and the three settle into a daily routine. While Clifford sleeps in the morning, Phoebe works in the shop, which the public seems to enjoy. In the afternoons, Hepzibah takes over in the shop while Phoebe spends time with Clifford.

X: The Pyncheon-Garden

Phoebe often takes Clifford into the garden, where she reads to him. Clifford prefers poetry and is deeply delighted by the flowers in the garden. He is particularly fond of the scarlet blossoms found on some of the bean-vines, which Holgrave planted after finding the presumably ancient seeds in one of the garrets. The blossoms attract an ongoing stream of hummingbirds, which Clifford watches with childlike enthusiasm. Hepzibah is both happy and sad to see her brother's reaction. She remembers that the hummingbirds had the same effect on him in his youth, yet she is saddened by his present state. For his part, Clifford wants to be sure that what he is experiencing is real and sometimes asks Phoebe to pinch him or to give him a rose so that he can prick himself with the thorns. One day, Clifford asks that the hens be freed from their enclosure. When Hepzibah cooks one of the hen's recently layed eggs, the rooster "delivered himself of a harangue that might have proved as long as his own pedigree." Clifford likes to spend time looking into Maule's Well, where beautiful faces formed from the colored pebbles at the bottom greet him. Occasionally, dark faces appear and hamper his mood for the remainder of the day. On Sundays after Phoebe attends church, Clifford, Hepzibah, Holgrave, and Uncle Venner gather for picnics in the garden. Clifford feels young in Uncle Venner's presence and is uncharacteristically social with him. Holgrave tries to engage with Clifford as well, but seems to be motivated by something other than beneficence. One Sunday, Clifford sadly declares that he wants his happiness. The narrator calls Clifford part crazy and part imbecile and cautions him to enjoy what he has because happiness other than this may always elude him.

XI: The Arched Window

In addition to taking Clifford to the garden, Phoebe often brings him to sit in front of the window that faces the street. From there, he watches passersby. Clifford finds all of the new inventions strange, including the omnibus, the water-cart, the cab, and the railroad steam-devil. He prefers the things of his past, like the butcher's cart, the fish -cart, and the scissor-grinder. One afternoon, an organ player stops in front of the house. While the greedy monkey plies the crowd for money, the organ player turns the crank, which plays music and also sets a host of small figures into action. The narrator notes that despite the actions engaged in by each figure, when the music stops, they have come no further than when they started. The cobbler does not finish making his shoe, the blacksmith's iron is not shaped, and the milkmaid has fetched no milk. Clifford enjoys the music but finally cries about the monkey because of its physical and spiritual ugliness. On another day, a procession passes the house and while watching the throngs of people, Clifford makes an attempt to jump into the crowd from the balcony. He is stopped by Phoebe and Hepzibah, but the narrator notes that such a plunge into the sea of humanity may have been a help to him. One Sunday, Clifford and Hepzibah decide to go to church. The two ready themselves but are unable to step out of the house. Clifford claims that they are ghosts whose only place is right there in the house. On yet another day, Clifford blows bubbles off the balcony, and one bubble lands and pops on Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's nose. The judge mocks Clifford for still partaking in childish endeavors. Clifford is overcome with fear.

XII: The Daguerreotypist

When Clifford retires for the day, Phoebe spends her time shopping and reading the Bible. She has grown pensive and more mature under the influence of her relations and her stay in their home. Her only social outlet is Holgrave, who despite their almost daily encounters she feels she does not really know. Holgrave was independent early in life and has held many jobs, including schoolmaster, salesman, peddler, and dentist. He has traveled in Europe and lectured about mesmerism. Despite such experiences, he is not learned and is marked by youthful passion more than intellect. In one of his meetings with Phoebe, with whom he appears smitten, Holgrave shares his views about the past and the future. He argues that everything in the past should be discarded and that before men can make their own mark on the world, they must rid themselves of the influence of previous generations. He believes that each new generation should start fresh, building their own public buildings and even homes. He argues that the House of the Seven Gables should be burned and cleansed of its awful past. Toward the end of their conversation, the legend of Colonel Pyncheon and Matthew Maule surfaces, and Holgrave tells Phoebe that he means to publish some of the Pyncheon history in a magazine. After Pheobe accedes to hearing it, he produces his manuscript of the story and begins to read.

XIII: Alice Pyncheon

The thirteenth chapter presents the text of Holgrave's story. Gervayse Pyncheon, having recently returned from Europe, requests that Matthew Maule (the younger) come to the House of the Seven Gables. Gervayse believes that Matthew may know the whereabouts of the deed to the land in Maine that Colonel Pyncheon was in the process of acquiring at the time of his death. Matthew is described as an unpopular man and despite his lower class status, enters the Pyncheon house through the front door. Gervayse offers Matthew money in exchange for information about the missing deed; however, Matthew refuses. When Matthew eventually agrees to give Gervayse the information in exchange for the House of the Seven Gables, the two confirm their agreement in writing and with a drink. Before leaving, Matthew asks to see Gervayse's daughter, Alice. When Alice looks at him admiringly, Matthew misconstrues her look as disapproval. Matthew mesmerizes Alice in an attempt to summon the spirits of his father, grandfather, and Colonel Pyncheon. Gervayse intervenes and attempts to stop the process; however, on Alice's insistence, Matthew continues. Once summoned, the Maule spirits prevent the spirit of Colonel Pyncheon from telling where the deed is hidden. Matthew Maule (the younger) tells Gervayse that the secret must be kept until the deed is worthless and awakes Alice. Alice remains under his spell, however, and at any time, he can simply command her to laugh, be sad, or dance, and she does his bidding. On his wedding day, Matthew summons Alice to wait on his bride. She does so, and finally Matthew releases Alice from her spell. Alice kisses the bride and walks home in the snow in inappropriate clothes. She catches a cold and ultimately dies. Matthew attends the funeral procession, noting that he only meant to humble her and now she was dead.

XIV: Phoebe's Good Bye

Having listened carefully to Holgrave's detailed story, Phoebe is mesmerized. Holgrave is attempting to keep Phoebe under his spell; however, his integrity and value of the individual inspires him to awaken her. As the two watch the moon come up, Holgrave comments on his current happiness while Phoebe reflects that she has seen gayer days. Her time with Hepzibah and Clifford has aged her and, she hopes, made her wiser. Holgrave assures her that she is simply maturing and that what she is experiencing is an important part of the development of her soul. Phoebe gets up to help Hepzibah with the day's accounts when Holgrave acknowledges that she will briefly be returning to her country home. He tells Phoebe that her presence has much improved the lives of Hepzibah and Clifford, who for the most part are dead souls. When Phoebe wonders if he means well by the Pyncheon siblings, he responds that unlike her, he is not compelled to help them, but rather to observe them. Holgrave says that he believes that Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon is ill-intentioned and that trouble is brewing. Two mornings later, Phoebe is tearful as she leaves, and Hepzibah notices that the young woman's smile is not as bright as it was upon her arrival. Clifford bids her goodbye, telling her that she has matured into a beautiful woman. Phoebe passes Uncle

Venner, who like Holgrave, tells her what a boon she has been to the Pyncheon siblings. He likens her to an angel and hopes she will return quickly.

XV: The Scowl and the Smile

The days following Phoebe's departure are dreary and stormy. Hepzibah's business falls off, and Clifford takes to his bed. Making matters worse, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon arrives and insists upon seeing Clifford. He at first tries to sweet talk Hepzibah with words of kindness and love about her and Clifford. Hepzibah remains cold and bitter and refuses to let him see Clifford, whom she fears would be unable to handle the encounter. Eventually, the judge becomes enraged. He tells Hepzibah that Clifford knows the whereabouts of certain necessary paperwork about the large remaining portion of their uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon's estate and threatens to have Clifford committed to an asylum if Hepzibah does not let him talk with him. Hepzibah insists that Clifford could not possibly know anything about the hidden wealth, but fearing her cousin's intentions, goes to summon Clifford. The judge sits in the chair that Colonel Pyncheon occupied upon his death and waits.

XVI: Clifford's Chamber

While Hepzibah slowly ascends the stairs to Clifford's room, she wonders if he could possibly know anything about the missing portion of their uncle's estate. She concludes it is impossible and ponders going for help. She knows the community would favor the judge and instead attempts to find Holgrave, who she discovers is not in his room. Giving in to the inevitable meeting, she knocks on Clifford's door and after receiving no answer, she enters to find that he is not in bed. Fearing he may have left and drowned himself to escape his cousin's inquiry, Hepzibah returns to the parlor to summon the judge for help. Despite Hepzibah's emotional and animated outbursts, the judge does not move or respond. Clifford appears and pointing into the parlor, tells Hepzibah that they are now free to dance, sing, play, and be as happy as Phoebe. Going into the parlor, Hepzibah realizes that the judge is dead. Clifford tells Hepzibah that they must go and the two leave the house.

XVII: The Flight of Two Owls

Clifford and Hepzibah board the train. Hepzibah feels as though she is in a dream while Clifford feels exhilarated by the events. Clifford begins a conversation with a fellow passenger, noting the merits of the railroad and its ability to take people away from their homes and parlors. Contrary to his previous favoring of the things of yore, Clifford expounds that the railroad is one of the greatest modern inventions for it will enable people to return to their nomadic routes. He argues that men need to be on the move rather than cooped up in their homes. Speaking of the House of the Seven Gables, Clifford deems that it should be burned because of the image of the dead man that it conjures in his mind. Hepzibah asks Clifford to be quiet for fear that the traveler may

think he is crazy. Enlivened by his thoughts, however, Clifford continues, pointing to the merits of mesmerism and the telegraph. He likes that friends and lovers can be more connected via the telegraph, yet expresses disdain for its use to catch criminals. Clifford and Hepzibah depart the train and all of Clifford's energy drains away. He tells Hepzibah that she must now take charge of their future. Hepzibah prays that God will guide them.

XVIII: Governor Pyncheon

Judge Pyncheon remains motionless in the parlor. Despite having open eyes, he is not breathing. His watch continues to tick as the narrator inquires why he lingers. The narrator addresses him, asking if he has forgotten his appointments for the day, especially his dinner with important personages from throughout the state who he was hoping to persuade to nominate him as a candidate for governor. The narrator encourages the judge to make haste; however, he of course does not. A procession of Pyncheon spirits then enters the room, starting with Colonel Pyncheon followed by the next six generations. Noticing that Judge Pyncheon's son is among the spirits, the narrator notes that the judge's wealth will now go to Clifford, Hepzibah, and Phoebe. When the next morning comes and the judge still does not stir, the narrator gives up the address just as the shop-bell rings.

XIX: Alice's Posies

The storm has ended, and the neighborhood is alive. The flowers on top of the house are in bloom. Uncle Venner arrives at the House of the Seven Gables to pick up the food Hepzibah sets aside for his pigs, and Holgrave tells him that no one is home. When Mrs. Gubbins comes to the shop, a neighbor tells her that she will not be able buy anything because Hepzibah and Clifford left yesterday to go to Judge Pyncheon's. Ned Higgens also comes to the shop to find it closed. The two laborers pass and speculate that Hepzibah has run off because her shop has failed. When the butcher comes, he peeks inside and believes he sees Clifford sitting in the parlor rudely ignoring his knocking. The organ player also arrives and after playing for a bit is warned to move on because rumor has it that the judge has been murdered in the house. Finding Judge Pyncheon's card with his datebook items for the previous day on the back of it on the porch, one of the laborers deems that they should take it to the City Marshal. Phoebe arrives and is warned by Ned Higgins that something wicked is inside. As Phoebe knocks at the door, it opens before her. She assumes it is Hepzibah opening it. She steps inside, and it closes behind her.

XX: The Flower of Eden

Holgrave, not Hepzibah, leads Phoebe into what had been the grand reception room. He tells her that Hepzibah and Clifford are gone and shows her the daguerreotype of the judge he made some time ago. He then shows her one he just completed, and she surmises that the judge is dead. Holgrave tells Phoebe that he has not told anyone

about the death because he believes that with Hepzibah and Clifford gone and the similarity between the judge's death and uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon's, the two will be implicated. Holgrave believes that the judge's death, if evaluated properly, will show that his death occurred because of an inherited family condition. He also tells Pheobe that he believes the judge made uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon's death look violent after the man had already died of the same affliction. Holgrave then professes his love for Phoebe and vice versa. Just then, Hepzibah and Clifford return home. Clifford is glad to be home and seems stronger than Hepzibah, who is in tears.

XXI: The Departure

The judge's death creates a stir until the public learns that he died of natural causes. They seem to easily forget him except for the rumors that now surface about his less than benevolent past. A rumor now prevails that the night of old Jaffrey Pyncheon's death, the younger Jaffrey rummaged through the elder man's papers. Part way through the task, old Jaffrey surprised his nephew. As a result of the shock and his hereditary disposition, the elder Jaffrey died of apoplexy. The younger Jaffrey continued to look through the papers and destroyed a new version of his uncle's will, which left a favorable portion of the man's estate to Clifford. To avoid suspicion, the judge arranged clues that pointed police to Clifford as the assailant. Jaffrey did not intend Clifford be tried for murder; however, he never told authorities about his own part in his uncle's death. In subsequent years, the younger Jaffrey wrote the incident off to youth and rarely thought about it. Next, readers learn that the judge's only heir, his son, has died of cholera while traveling and that as a result, Clifford, Hepzibah, Phoebe, and Holgrave are now to enjoy the judge's riches. Though Clifford is never restored to his former self, he is greatly brightened by the judge's death. Clifford, Hepzibah, Phoebe, and Holgrave move to the judge's country estate as do the Pyncheon hens, who become prolific egg layers. In the face of the change, Holgrave's progressive views seem to be becoming more conservative. On the day of their departure, the foursome and Uncle Venner gaze upon Colonel Pyncheon's portrait and Clifford comments that he has a hazy remembrance about the portrait holding a secret about wealth. Holgrave taps a hidden spring on the portrait, which sends the picture toppling to the floor. In the open space that is revealed, everyone sees the legendary deed to the land in Maine. Hepzibah comments that Clifford must have mentioned something in his youth about the portrait to the judge, who then mistakenly believed that Clifford knew something about the whereabouts of their uncle's remaining estate. Holgrave reveals that he knows of the spring because he is the son of Thomas Maule, who hid the parchment behind the portrait when he built the house. Uncle Venner ventures that the claim is now worthless. Phoebe insists that Uncle Venner come live in the cottage on the judge's property. Clifford seconds the invitation and when the foursome prepare to depart, Uncle Venner is to follow them a few days later. Children gather around the carriage, and Hepzibah notices Ned Higgins, to whom she gives some money. The two laborers pass and acknowledge Hepzibah's good fortune. Leaving the house, Uncle Venner fancies he hears Alice Pyncheon playing her harpsichord as she ascends to heaven.

Characters

Ned Higgins

Ned Higgins, a young boy, is Hepzibah's first shop customer. He is a repeat customer who enjoys the shop's gingerbread cookies. When Phoebe returns from her visit home and later discovers that the judge has died in the parlor, Ned warns her that something wicked has happened in the house. As Hepzibah, Clifford, Phoebe, and Holgrave leave to take up residence at the judge's country estate, Hepzibah gives Ned money.

Holgrave

Holgrave is a resident in one of the gables in the House of the Seven Gables. The narrator describes him as "a slender young man, not more than one or two and twenty years old, with a rather grave and thoughtful expression, for his years, but likewise a springy alacrity and vigor." He is exceptionally supportive of Hepzibah's opening of the cent shop. Holgrave falls in love with Phoebe and, in the final chapter, reveals that he is a descendent of Matthew Maule. Toward the end of the story, Holgrave tells Clifford, Hepzibah, and Phoebe where the now worthless deed to the Maine land can be found. Holgrave is a young and passionate character whose politics run contrary to the conservative ideals that the aristocratic Hepzibah embraces. Both professionally and personally, he represents the coming of the modern age and the retiring of past traditions. Although he has dabbled in several occupations, including dentistry and teaching, Holgrave is now a daguerreotypist, or a photographer. His profession represents the way in which he is a forward thinker who enjoys the changes brought by technology. Unlike Clifford, who is at first nostalgic about the past, Holgrave favors the future. Like his ancestor, Matthew Maule, Holgrave has the power of mesmerism, or the ability to hypnotize people. Unlike the younger Matthew Maule, Holgrave does not use this power in harmful ways against other people, specifically Phoebe.

Matthew Maule (The Elder)

Matthew Maule is the first owner of the land upon which the House of the Seven Gables is eventually built. He is not a man of great wealth or power, yet he stands up against Colonel Pyncheon and refuses to give him his land. As a result, Maule is put on trial for practicing witchcraft and is ultimately convicted and hung. Just before his death, Maule curses Colonel Pyncheon, who watches the proceedings from horseback. Maule says, "God will give him blood to drink." When Pyncheon dies mysteriously after building a home on Maule's land, the curse is believed by some to be the reason. Maule's son, Thomas, served as the architect of the House of the Seven Gables.

Matthew Maule (The Younger)

The younger Matthew Maule is the grandson of Matthew Maule (the elder). His father, Thomas Maule built the House of the Seven Gables. The younger Matthew Maule makes a deal with Gervayse Pyncheon, telling him that he will tell him where the legendary deed is for the land in Maine in trade for the House of the Seven Gables. Using his powers of mesmerism, Matthew hypnotizes Alice Pyncheon, Gervayse's daughter, and conjures the spirits of Colonel Pyncheon, the elder Matthew Maule, and Thomas Maule. The Maule spirits thwart his efforts and refuse to let the Colonel tell him where the papers are hidden. Matthew Maule (the younger) cancels the deal with Gervayse but keeps Alice Pyncheon under his spell. He makes her do humiliating things and eventually, releasing her from his spell, allows her to walk home improperly clothed for snow. She dies as a result.

Thomas Maule

Thomas Maule is the son of Matthew Maule (the elder) and the father of Matthew Maule (the younger). He is the architect that built the House of the Seven Gables. When Thomas builds the house, he hides the deed to the legendary land in Maine behind the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon.

Alice Pyncheon

Alice Pyncheon is the daughter of Gervayse Pyncheon, the granddaughter of Colonel Pyncheon, and Phoebe's great-great-grand-aunt. Hepzibah describes her as "exceedingly beautiful and accomplished." Alice is hypnotized by the younger Matthew Maule and forced to act in embarrassing and humiliating ways, including waiting on his bride. Once Alice is released from Matthew's spell, she walks home inappropriately clothed for the snow and dies. The flowers that grow in between two of the gables are said to have been sprinkled there by Alice. They are called Alice's Posies. Sometimes the sounds of her harpsichord are said to be heard in the house.

Clifford Pyncheon

Clifford Pyncheon is Hepzibah's brother and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's cousin. After being framed by his cousin for the murder of his uncle, Old Jaffrey Pyncheon, Clifford is imprisoned for thirty years. He returns to the House of the Seven Gables following his imprisonment and is cared for by Hepzibah and Phoebe. Prior to his incarceration, Clifford is a man of privilege who enjoys all that is beautiful. This quality persists in him and is evident in his inability to look at his unattractive, scowling sister and his desire to quit the "dismal house" for finer accommodations in the South of France and Italy. He fancies Phoebe and seems to lose himself in the sensual undertaking of eating. Following his imprisonment, Clifford is a changed man. No longer masculine or mature, he is characterized by the narrator as feminine and childlike. When readers first meet

Clifford, he is described as elderly and spiritless. The narrator writes "It was the spirit of the man, that could not walk" as though he "must have suffered some miserable wrong from its earthly experience." Early in the novel, Clifford is enamored of the past and watches wistfully from the arched window as modern inventions pass. He wishes to recover the life that is symbolized by the "antique fashions of the street." His past, however, is lost. After finding Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon dead, Clifford seems more equipped to embrace the future. As he and Hepzibah flee by train, he talks with a fellow traveler and lauds the advances of modern science and technology. Clifford's new attitude toward technology and his inherited wealth from Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon foretell a brighter future for him as well as for Hepzibah, Phoebe, and Holgrave, who all move out of the House of the Seven Gables to the judge's estate.

Colonel Pyncheon

Colonel Pyncheon is the man who had the House of the Seven Gables built 160 years before the action of the story takes place. He built the house on a piece of land that first belonged to Matthew Maule (the elder). Colonel Pyncheon was instrumental in having the elder Matthew Maule put to death for witchcraft. As a result of Matthew's death, Colonel Pyncheon was able to seize the land that he had long tried to obtain from Matthew. On the day that Colonel Pyncheon hosts a grand house warming party with many important community members in attendance, he is found dead in his study. In the story that unfolds, Colonel Pyncheon's portrait still hangs in the house and the legend of the Pyncheon and Maule conflict serves as the basis for one of Hawthorne's themes, which is that the sins of the past are carried down through successive generations. Like the Colonel, two other Pyncheon men die of apoplexy, an unexpected hemorrhage.

Gervayse Pyncheon

Gervayse is Colonel Pyncheon's son and Alice Pyncheon's father. In the story that Holgrave relates to Phoebe, Gervayse is said to have returned from Europe and begun to search for the deed to the land in Maine that the Colonel was in the process of acquiring at the time of his death. Gervayse summons the younger Matthew Maule to the house and makes a deal to give him the House of the Seven Gables in exchange for information about the missing deed. Matthew (the younger) then hypnotizes Alice, who eventually dies due in part to his mistreatment of her. Gervayse's greed can be blamed for his daughter's death.

Hepzibah Pyncheon

Hepzibah is the struggling spinster heroine of the novel. She resides in the House of the Seven Gables. She is Clifford's sister and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's niece. In the novel, she represents "old Gentility" with a reverence for the past and her previously well-to-do life. The narrator describes her "cherished and ridiculous consciousness" of her privileged ancestry, "her shadowy claims to princely territory." He recounts her

accomplishments as having "thrummed on a harpsichord, and walked a minuet, and worked an antique tapestry-stitch on her sampler." As an aristocrat who has fallen into poverty, Hepzibah must save herself from complete financial destitution by opening a cent-shop in her home. The townspeople have little compassion for her and suspect her enterprise will fail. For the most part, the residents of the town seem to dislike Hepzibah. The narrator writes "they cared nothing for her dignity, and just as little for her degradation." She is an unattractive woman who has a perpetual scowl. Her rough and unapproachable exterior, however, hides a tender heart. She is deeply devoted to her brother and holds deep hatred and contempt for her cousin. Hepzibah's impoverished existence seems to better her. The narrator writes "she had been enriched by poverty, developed by sorrow . . . and endowed with heroism, which never could have characterized her in what are called happier circumstances."

Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon (The Younger)

Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon is Hepzibah and Clifford's cousin and the nephew of old Jaffrey Pyncheon. The judge dies toward the end of the book, and because his son dies from cholera, Clifford inherits the judge's riches. Prior to becoming a judge, the younger Jaffrey Pyncheon facilitated the death of his uncle. While the young Jaffrey was rifling through the old man's papers, the elder Jaffrey Pyncheon happened upon him and died of apoplexy. The younger Jaffrey destroyed a newly revised version of the elder Jaffrey's will, which favored Clifford, and successfully framed Clifford for their uncle's death. The judge later assists in Clifford's release from jail and his return to the House of the Seven Gables in hopes that he can help him locate papers that will point him to the remainder of their uncle's estate. As the narrator tells us, the judge was "reckoned rather a dissipated youth, but had at once reformed, and made himself an exceedingly respectable member of society." He served in an "inferior court" and later "served a part of two terms in Congress." Despite living a life "befitting the christian, the good citizen, the horticulturist, and the gentleman," Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's status as a good man is a farce. Hawthorne evidences this fact by drawing strong comparison's between the judge and Colonel Pyncheon. When shown Holgrave's photograph of the judge, Phoebe mistakes him for the Colonel, and the narrator comments of their likeness:

It implied that the weaknesses and defects, the bad passions, the mean tendencies, and the moral diseases which lead to crime, are handed down from one generation to another, by a far surer process of transmission than human law has been able to establish, in respect to the riches and honors which it seeks to entail upon posterity.

Like the Colonel, the judge is motivated by his own greed and strong desire for self-aggrandizement. He is a selfish, deceitful, and cruel man. His apparently benevolent attempts to help Clifford and Hepzibah are as false as the smiles he presents to the public. In the end, the public learns (albeit) through rumors, about his hand in the old Jaffrey Pyncheon's death and Clifford's imprisonment.

Old Jaffrey Pyncheon

Old Jaffrey Pyncheon is the uncle of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, Clifford, and Hepzibah. Like Colonel Pyncheon, old Jaffrey Pyncheon dies of apoplexy. His affliction is triggered when he finds the younger Jaffrey rifling through his personal papers. The younger Jaffrey Pyncheon inherits the elder's wealth. Old Jaffrey Pyncheon believed that "Matthew Maule, the wizard, had been wronged out of his homestead, if not out of his life," and intended "to make restitution to Maule's posterity" before his death, but was unable to do so.

Phoebe Pyncheon

Phoebe is a Pyncheon relation from the country. She comes to visit Hepzibah after her (Phoebe's) mother remarries. She falls in love with Holgrave, cares for Clifford when he cannot bear to look at his sister, and much to the neighborhood's delight, works in Hepzibah's cent-shop. Whereas Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon (the younger) can be seen to represent all that is evil, Phoebe represents all that is good. The narrator describes her as "very pretty; as graceful as a bird, and graceful much in the same way; as pleasant, about the house, as a gleam of sunshine." In sum, she is the epitome of "feminine grace." The narrator stresses Phoebe's good nature and ability to transform the places and people she encounters by her sweet disposition and charming voice. Like the sunshine, she has a refreshing influence on all of the characters, particularly Hepzibah and Clifford. When Phoebe first arrives at the House of the Seven Gables, she fixes up her living quarters. The narrator notes that it had now "been purified of all former evil and sorrow by her sweet breath and happy thoughts." Such is her effect throughout the narrative. For all of her beauty, Phoebe is not an intellectual and is naöive about the evil's of human nature; however, she becomes wiser as the novel progresses.

Uncle Venner

Uncle Venner is one of the oldest habitants of Pyncheon Street who befriends Hepzibah, Clifford, and Phoebe. He is one of Hepzibah's first customers. Clifford finds his company agreeable as well, and he joins the two along with Phoebe and Holgrave for picnics. The narrator says that he "was commonly regarded as rather deficient, than otherwise, in his wits," but that there was "something like poetry in him." In sum, Uncle Venner is described as "a miscellaneous old gentleman, partly himself, but, in good measure, somebody else; patched together, too, of different epochs; an epitome of times and fashions." In the end, Uncle Venner joins Clifford, Hepzibah, Phoebe, and Holgrave in their move to the judge's country estate.

Social Concerns

As he does in The Scarlet Letter (1850), Hawthorne takes for the subject of The House of the Seven Gables the history of his New England forebears.

Concentrating on the rigid social dicta which governed the lives — both public and private — of the citizens of Salem, Massachusetts, he presents a graphic image of the cruelties which resulted from adherence to strict codes of behavior which fail to take into account human feelings.

One might reduce the principal theme of The House of the Seven Gables to a single quotation from the Bible:

"The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon their sons." Certainly at the heart of the novel is the notion that the behavior of one's ancestors determines in a significant way the present opportunities and attitudes of succeeding generations. Through the story of the Pyncheon family, the novelist demonstrates how an ancient curse — here used metaphorically to describe the effects ensuing from the sin committed by the original Colonel Pyncheon in defrauding Matthew Maule — can only be broken when the family performs some act of redemption. The complex plot of the novel is designed to create the circumstances under which the generations of Pyncheons whose story is central to Hawthorne's story are able to rid themselves of the curse by renouncing the House — another symbol, used by the author to represent graphically the ill-gotten advantage which the Pyncheons had realized as a result of the Colonel's dealings with the first of the Maule family. Throughout the novel Hawthorne hints that their tale is a rendition of the myth of Eden, a tale of loss and redemption in which the power of love allows the hero and heroine to transcend the original sin of their ancestors.

Techniques

In his celebrated Preface to the novel, Hawthorne makes a point of calling The House of the Seven Gables a romance.

Intent on distinguishing it from the novel, which he asserts is bound more closely to tenets of verisimilitude, the novelist insists his work is less concerned with representing with exactitude the everyday life of the people he writes about than it is with offering readers a portrait of human nature that is psychologically true. Hawthorne makes use of the intrusive and omniscient narrator, who comments on the actions of the men and women in the story and directs readers to an understanding of both character and theme.

A master of the use of symbolism, Hawthorne fills this novel with objects and people who serve to highlight his themes and suggest a greater dimension to his work. Without question, the central symbol is the House itself.

Erected by the Pyncheons on the spot of land which the Colonel wrested from Matthew Maule, it represents the decay of a family whose fortunes have been ill-gotten. The elm tree which stands outside its door keeps out the sun and seems to engulf the edifice in a gloom which permeates the lives of the inhabitants of the House.

As he does in many of his other works, Hawthorne also makes masterful use of light and darkness to suggest moral states. Phoebe Pyncheon is constantly associated with the light; she seems to bring sunshine into any place she enters, indicating a wholesomeness and moral rectitude which sets her apart from other Pyncheons, who suffer from the decay associated with the family. Inside the house, darkness pervades, and it is only through Phoebe's actions that Hepzibah and Clifford emerge from the metaphorical darkness which surrounds them. Also prevalent throughout The House of the Seven Gables are references to classical mythology and to the Bible. These allusions link Hawthorne's story with the Western tradition in literature, giving the events in this small New England town an air of universal significance.

Themes

Subsequent Generations Inherit the Sins of Their Ancestors

As stated in the preface, one of the primary themes in *The House of the Seven Gables* is that "the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones." In this case, Colonel Pyncheon's support of Matthew Maule's prosecution and ultimate execution start the chain of events that seem to carry down through the generations. Just before his death, Matthew Maule (the elder) curses Colonel Pyncheon, stating that "God will give him blood to drink." During the Colonel's first house warming festivities, he indeed dies with blood covering his beard and shirt. This first death is followed by the similar deaths of old Jaffrey Pyncheon and his nephew, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon. Although these deaths can be attributed to a family predisposition for apoplexy, the existence of the curse and the similar nature of each death suggest something supernatural about the way in which such sinful behavior resurfaces within a family's lineage. This supernatural element conveys the idea that individuals are somewhat unable to control their own destinies. Another way to read Hawthorne's suggested theme, however, is that in this case, the Pyncheon family was not cursed by Matthew Maule and his supernatural powers as much as they were by their own folly. Colonel Pyncheon, old Jaffrey Pyncheon, Alice Pyncheon, and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon all die because of either their own avarice or that of one of their close family members. To this extent, then, the responsibility for evil or wrong doing lies with the individual rather than with the ancestors who may have made similarly poor decisions and had similar personality and character flaws.

Class Distinctions and the Fall of the Aristocracy

Hawthorne devotes much of his commentary in this novel to the discussion of class. This theme is first introduced by the distinctions between the Pyncheon and Maule families and their descendents. The Pyncheons were a prominent, wealthy, and successful family while the Maules were "generally poverty-stricken; always plebian and obscure; working with unsuccessful diligence at handicrafts; laboring on the wharves, or following the sea." Despite the general financial success of the Pyncheon family, one of its members, Hepzibah, has strikingly fallen from grace. Through her struggle about opening and running the cent-shop readers learn about aristocratic views of the lower classes and vice-versa. Now impoverished, Hepzibah represents both the aristocratic viewpoint and that of the working class. In the third chapter, the narrator writes of her:

On the whole, therefore, her new experience led our decayed gentlewoman to very disagreeable conclusions as to the temper and manners of what she termed the lower classes, whom, heretofore, she had looked down upon with a gentle and pitying complaisance, as herself occupying a sphere of unquestionable superiority.

Within moments of this thought, however, she expresses disdain for "a lady, in a delicate and costly summer garb, with a floating veil and gracefully swaying gown." She says "for what good end, in the wisdom of Providence, does that woman live? Must the whole world toil, that the palms of her hands may be kept white and delicate?" Although the narrator, and by extension Hawthorne, writes that "since there must be evil in the world . . . a high man is as likely to grasp his share of it as a low one," he seems in part to favor the working class. Of Hepzibah, he writes:

Truly was there something high, generous, and noble, in her native composition of our poor old Hepzibah . . . . she had been enriched by poverty, developed by sorrow . . . and endowed with heroism, which never could have characterized her in what are called happier circumstances.

Greed's Costly Consequences

Another predominant theme in this novel is greed. Colonel Pyncheon's original motivation for supporting the execution of Matthew Maule (the elder) involved his strong desire to obtain the property that had long belonged to him (Matthew). Ultimately, the Colonel builds his home on Matthew's land and meets his death during his first house-warming feast. Successive generations of Pyncheons also seem to be afflicted with this trait. Gervayse Pyncheon's desire to find the deed to the legendary land in Maine leads to the death of his daughter, Alice. Likewise, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's pursuit of his uncle's estate leads to his death and that of his uncle, old Jaffrey Pyncheon. In each case, Pyncheons suffer because of their desire to obtain wealth. This desire blinds them and prohibits them from making moral decisions. Thus, the cost of greed can be seen not only as the loss of morality, but of life itself.

Style

Gothic Romance

The House of the Seven Gables is a Gothic novel, which is a type of novel that was popularized in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gothic romances trace back to Horace Walpole's 1765 novel, *The Castle of Otranto* and were often mysteries that involved the supernatural. Characteristically, novels of this type take place in haunted castles or other remote and isolated locations. Often, gothic romances involve a heroine in peril and are peppered with horror and violence. *The House of the Seven Gables* clearly takes after this genre. Though not a castle, the House of the Seven Gables is a desolate home that has a seemingly ongoing history of violence within its walls. The house is haunted by the curse that Matthew Maule (the elder) placed on Colonel Pyncheon in 1692 just before the former's execution for witchcraft. The mysterious deaths of Colonel Pyncheon, Jaffrey Pyncheon, and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, along with Matthew Maule's alleged witchcraft, his grandson's ability to mesmerize Alice Pyncheon, and later Holgrave's ability to do the same with Phoebe all can be seen as supernatural elements within the text.

Third-Person Omniscient and First-Person Plural Point of View

The House of the Seven Gables is told primarily in the third-person omniscient point of view. This means that the narrator, who is not a character in the story, tells the events of the story from a "godlike" perspective. The narrator knows everything about the characters and the events, past and present, relating to the action of the story. Interestingly, there are times that Hawthorne's narrator lapses into the first-person plural point of view, referring to himself and an unknown other person (perhaps the reader, perhaps not) as "we." While the third-person omniscient point of view suggests that the narrator is all-knowing and perhaps reasonably objective, the first-person plural narrative style suggests that the narrator may be telling the story from a more subjective position. In the preface, the narrator makes a point to tell readers that the story they are about to read is a "Romance" rather than a "Novel." The narrator makes this distinction in order to alert readers that the tale is a truth being told in a manner reflecting the "writer's own choosing and creation." This claim and the presence of the first-person plural narration suggests that the narrator is likely imparting his personal take on the events rather than depicting them as a wholly objective narrator might.

Light and Dark Imagery

Light and dark imagery permeates *The House of the Seven Gables*. As Richard Harter Fogle notes in *Hawthorne's Imagery: The Proper 'Light and Shadow' in the Major Romances*, the house as well as the characters are all cast in a reoccurring pattern of

lightness-darkness or sunshine-storm. For Fogle, light and sunshine stand for "general good fortune, for material prosperity, and for harmonious kinship with society." On the other hand, he likens the storm or darkness to "misfortune and the isolation of the original Puncheon sin." With this observation in mind, one can readily place the characters within their respective realms. Phoebe is associated with light. While Hepzibah and Clifford were once associated with light, they have fallen into darkness. Judge Jaffrey Puncheon, as Fogle notes, is "a false sun god" who "passes from one extreme to the other." First, he beams smiles and is a picture of beneficence incarnate; then, he changes and exposes his darker, greedier, and ill-intentioned self.

Historical Context

The United States: The Mid-Nineteenth Century

At the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, Americans were optimistically looking forward to the future. Opportunity was the buzzword of the day as territorial expansion and the industrial revolution continued to sweep the nation. The gold rush was on in California and with such economic opportunity feeding their dreams, Americans continued to seek land, wealth, and individual success.

Despite such hope and enthusiasm, the country was becoming increasingly divided on the issue of slavery. The debate about abolition was closely linked to the issue of territorial expansion. During President James K. Polk's term in office, the United States nearly doubled in size, but with this expansion came questions of the status of blacks in the new territories. With the Compromise of 1850, California was admitted to the United States as a "free" state, yet other territories were allowed to decide whether they wanted to permit slavery or not. Also in 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act went into effect, which stated that fugitive slave commissioners could issue arrest warrants for fugitive slaves and order their return to their masters. The act enraged anti-slavery states, and also in 1850, states like Vermont began to pass their own personal-liberty legislation. This legislation stated that fugitive slaves who escaped to free states did not have to be turned over to federal officers for return to their masters. Ultimately, the nation's deeply divided consciousness on the issue of slavery led to the American Civil War, which began in 1861.

While the nation's attention was largely focused on issues of slavery and territorial expansion, the women's rights movement continued to gain strength. The United States Constitution of 1787 lacked specifications about who had the right to vote, and thus left the question up to the states, who largely granted such rights only to landowning white men. In 1848, a group of women who supported abolition met in Seneca Falls, New York, and sought to change this preference. The group, which included Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, officially set the Woman's Rights Movement in motion, calling for suffrage and equal rights for women and blacks. In 1850, the first national women's rights convention was held in Worcester, Massachusetts, with Susan B. Anthony, Soujourner Truth, and Lucretia Mott all in attendance.

Witchcraft and the Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692

In 1692, a group of young women in Salem Village, which is now called Danvers, became hysterical after engaging in fortune telling rituals. The group, which included the minister's daughter, Ann Putnam, were eventually diagnosed as being under the spell of witchcraft and were pressed to tell who it was that had bewitched them. The girls began to accuse people, starting with three neighborhood women. The fervor took hold of the community and with a growing number of imprisonments resulting, the newly appointed

Massachusetts governor (Sir William Phips) convened a special court to try the accused. In the months that followed, one hundred and fifty arrests were made, and many people were imprisoned. In the end, twenty individuals were hanged for the crime of practicing witchcraft. Hawthorne's great-grandfather, John Hathorne, was one of the three judges to preside over the trials. In 1711, the Massachusetts General Court financially compensated the families of some of the victims and their families for the wrongdoing.

Critical Overview

Like much of Hawthorne's work, *The House of the Seven Gables* has received ongoing attention from critics and scholars since its publication in 1851. The Nathaniel Hawthorne Society (http://asweb.artsci.uc.edu/english/HawthorneSociety/nh.html), which was formed in 1976 for scholars interested in his work, reflects the degree to which Hawthorne's writing is still very much alive and vital in present day academia. To Hawthorne's credit, his work remains in print and remains part of the core curriculum taught in American literature courses.

Of his critics, Hawthorne himself was likely one of the strongest. In the introduction to *Hawthorne: The Critical Heritage*, J. Donald Crowley quotes Hawthorne writing to Longfellow:

As to my literary efforts, I do not think much of them□neither is it worthwhile to be ashamed of them. They would have been better, I trust, if written under more favorable circumstances. I have no external excitement□no consciousness that the public would like what I wrote, nor much hope, nor a very passionate desire that they should do so. Nevertheless, having nothing else to be ambitious of, I have felt considerably interested in literature.

Of *The House of the Seven Gables*, Crowley quotes Hawthorne again:

Sometimes, when tired of it, it strikes me that the whole is an absurdity from beginning to end . . . my prevailing idea is, that the book ought to succeed better than "The Scarlet Letter," though I have no idea it will.

In fact, *The House of the Seven Gables* did succeed better than *The Scarlet Letter* and both have continued to be some of Hawthorne's best-known and studied work.

As can be expected, the reviews, commentary, and critical analysis of *The House of the Seven Gables* have varied in focus over the past one-hundred and fifty-three years and will likely continue to do so. In *"The House of the Seven Gables": Severing Family and Colonial Ties*, Peter Buitenhuis notes that "each age has to reevaluate the classics and read them in the light of its own cultural and critical assumptions, which gradually change over time."

Upon its publication, *The House of the Seven Gables* garnered much praise. Writing for *Graham's Magazine* in 1851, Edwin Percy Whipple wrote "Taken as a whole, it is Hawthorne's greatest work, and is equally sure of immediate popularity and permanent fame." Henry Fothergill Chorley would agree. In his review of the novel for *Athanaeum* in 1851, Chorley wrote that Hawthorne "possesses the fertility as well as the ambition of Genius." He further commented that "few will dispute his claim to rank amongst the most original and complete novelists that have appeared in modern times."

In his day and beyond, however, Hawthorne has had his dissenters. He has been criticized for his characterizations, the novel's lack of plot structure, its point of view, and the somewhat too neatly tied up ending. In *Rage for Order: Essays in Criticism, 1948*, Austin Warren wrote "The characters do not really develop or change; and we do not find it easy to remember their speech, for Hawthorne has no considered notion of what parts of his story to put into dialogue, what not." He further criticizes the novel's point of view, stating:

The point of view is clumsily managed, for the novel professes to be narrated by an "I" who presently passes into "we." . . . The mind of no character is consistently used. . . . He never really gains by his liberties of omniscient commentator.

Despite its weaknesses, *The House of the Seven Gables* continues to be regarded as one of Hawthorne's greatest works and has served as fodder for a continuing diverse range of critical study. Critics have analyzed the work from divergent perspectives, evaluating its autobiographical, psychological, social, emotional, mythical, historical, and political implications. To be sure, such a wide range of interpretations will continue, for as Buitenhuis reminds "there is never an end to interpretation."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Robeson is a freelance writer with a master's degree in English. In this essay, Robeson explores the ambiguous views expressed in the novel about the aristocracy and the working classes.

Class distinctions permeate *The House of the Seven Gables*. The story commences with an immediate contrast between the wealthy Colonel Pyncheon and the farmer, Matthew Maule. Later, at Colonel Pyncheon's housewarming party, guests are either ushered into the kitchen or into the home's more stately rooms depending on "the high or low degree" of each person. Through these early images, readers have an immediate sense that issues of social class are one of Hawthorne's central themes. In that the novel is considered to reflect much of Hawthorne's own life, one must wonder to what degree his views about the aristocracy and the working classes are embedded within the story.

On the one hand, one might readily conclude that Hawthorne held contempt and disdain for the aristocracy for their idleness and unwavering interest in the acquisition of material wealth. The first villain of the story, Colonel Pyncheon, exemplifies all that is reprehensible in men of questionable morals who are self-indulgent and motivated simply by the desire to build their estates, figuratively and literally. At the same time, the characterization of Hepzibah serves to point out the lack of purpose or function that can sometimes epitomize the upper classes. While Hepzibah's shame about falling into poverty and being forced to open a cent-shop is an absolute horror to her, the narrator at times adapts a somewhat mocking tone in regards to both her angst and her understanding of her previously privileged social position. The narrator describes Hepzibah as having a "deeply cherished and ridiculous consciousness of long descent" from wealthy ancestors. Further, when the narrator notes her "accomplishments," which include "having formerly thrummed on a harpsichord, and walked a minuet, and worked an antique tapestry-stitch on her sampler," one can almost hear the laughter in the description. Of the shop opening, Hepzibah concludes "I never can go through with it! Never, never, never! I wish I were dead, and in the old family-tomb, with all my forefathers!" She no longer considers herself a lady of gentility and fears that she has brought a terrible disgrace upon her family. Yet, through Hepzibah's dialogue with Holgrave, readers glean a different perspective, one perhaps embraced by Hawthorne. Holgrave encourages Hepzibah, telling her:

These names of gentleman and lady had a meaning, in the past history of the world, and conferred privileges, desirable and otherwise, on those entitled to bear them. In the present□and still more in the future condition of society□they imply, not privilege, but restrictions!

He further assures her:

I look upon this as one of the fortunate days of your life. It ends an epoch and begins one. Hitherto, the lifeblood has been gradually chilling in your veins, as you sat aloof,

within your circle of gentility, while the rest of the world was fighting out its battle with one kind o necessity or another. Henceforth, you will at least have the sense of healthy and natural effort for a purpose.

For Hawthorne, there is something almost laughable in Hepzibah's dramatic feeling of loss, for to him, the aristocratic ways are a thing of the past, and valor and honor are now born of self-determination rather than inherited good fortune. Hawthorne's strongest opinions about the aristocracy's ongoing concern for the accrual of wealth seem to be conveyed best by the narrator's view of the monkey who accompanies the organ player. Of the monkey, the narrator says that he symbolized "the grossest form of the love of money. Neither was there any possibility of satisfying the covetous little devil." Through allusions to the devil and the Ten Commandments ("Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, or field . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbor.": Deuteronomy 5:21), Hawthorne shows not just a great disdain, but a moral aversion to aristocratic motivations. Through Uncle Venner, Hawthorne reinforces this perspective: "Men make a wonderful mistake in trying to head up a wonderful mistake in trying to heap up property upon property."

While the aristocracy seems to be looked down upon in this novel, the working class representatives seem to be respected, if not lauded. Phoebe is a perfect example. Although she is a Pyncheon, she is not part of the aristocracy, and yet, she is described by the narrator as more of a lady than Hepzibah. Further, because of her experience as a working class person, Hepzibah is viewed by the narrator as a better person: "She had been enriched by poverty, developed by sorrow, elevated by the strong and solitary affection of her life, and thus endowed with heroism, which never could have characterized her in what are called happier circumstances." Indeed, Hepzibah is improved by the experience. Once the shop is under way, she is filled with "a thrill of almost youthful enjoyment." The narrator notes:

It was the invigorating breath of a fresh outward atmosphere, after the long torpor and monotonous seclusion of her life. So wholesome is effort! So miraculous the strength that we do not know of! The healthiest glow, that Hepzibah had known for years, had come now, in the dreaded crisis, when, for the first time, she had put forth her hand to help herself.

Holgrave's assessment of the situation again perhaps reveals Hawthorne's own opinion. Of the shop opening, Holgrave tells Hepzibah, "This is success□all the success that anybody meets with!"

While the above seems to clearly indicate Hawthorne's distaste for the aristocracy and more favorable impression of the working classes, the novel also offers examples that would lead readers to question this assessment. For example, despite his position as a wealthy Pyncheon, old Jaffrey Pyncheon was compelled to right the wrongs of his ancestor, Colonel Pyncheon. Unlike the Colonel, old Jaffrey Pyncheon was a man of morals, who wanted to do right by the farmer whom he (old Jaffrey) believed suffered unjustly. Similarly, although his ancestor, Matthew Maule, used powers of hypnotism in mean spirited ways, Holgrave is not compelled to do the same. He is instead a man of

integrity who argues that individuals have the power to direct and create their own future. In these instances, the behavior expected from old Jaffrey Pyncheon and Holgrave runs counter to that of their ancestors. In another interesting reversal, Hepzibah changes her opinion both of the aristocratic and lower classes. After opening her shop, Hepzibah finds herself struggling "against a bitter emotion . . . towards the idle aristocracy," and at the same time coming to "very disagreeable conclusions as to the temper and manners of what she termed the lower classes, who, heretofore, she had looked down upon with a gentle and pitying complaisance, as herself occupying a sphere of unquestionable superiority."

In addition to the above, one must also consider the novel's ending in order to further flush out Hawthorne's message about social classes. In the end, Clifford and Hepzibah, once aristocratic and then destitute, inherit great wealth. Clifford, who earlier favored the things of the past, comes to expound the virtues of modern technology. Additionally, Phoebe and Holgrave, two characters whose bloodlines symbolize the historic conflict between the Pyncheons and the less well-to-do Maules, fall in love and marry. Holgrave, once a progressive and liberal man, finds himself becoming more conservative. Interestingly, the social and political extremes that seem so well articulated in the beginning of the novel all seem to reverse themselves or blend and merge toward the end. In several instances, Hawthorne hints at this tendency toward homogenization. When the parade passes the House of the Seven Gables, it is described as follows: Seen from above, the procession "melts all petty personalities, of which it is made up, into one broad mass of existence□one great life□one collected body of mankind, with a vast, homogenous spirit animating it." Earlier, he notes that "Since there is evil in the world, a high man or a low man are just as likely to grasp it."

Thus, although the novel seems to suggest a preference toward the working classes, one can certainly also conclude in a closer reading, that neither the privileged or the working classes are above reproach or solely worthy of praise. Hawthorne's ambiguous representation of the two classes and his imagery of the procession suggest that his disdain and admiration is not for one class or the other, but rather for all of humanity. He presents men's weaknesses and strengths and in the end seems to suggest that just evil-doers can be found in all walks of life, so can ladies and gentleman. Hawthorne's proscription for humanity ends well. Holgrave's belief that each person is empowered to create a good life for him or herself independent of their past and perhaps their personal foibles is a lasting message of hope. Although he says, "For, what other dungeon is so dark as one's own heart! What jailer so inexorable as one's self," the flip side of this is also true. There is nothing brighter than one's personal passions and convictions, nor it there anything more freeing than striving to live well in the world.

Source: Dustie Robeson, Critical Essay on *The House of the Seven Gables*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Hart has degrees in English and creative writing and is the author of several books. In this essay, Hart explores Hawthorne's use of environment to emphasize the psychological state of his characters.

The settings, or environments, that surround Hawthorne's characters in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables* are not only as fully detailed as the people in the novel are, but they make up an integral part of the story itself. For example, Hawthorne uses the rooms in which his characters sleep, the houses in which they live, as well as the light and darkness that surround them as a way to further describe and define the people he has created in this story. By exploring these environments, readers gain a deeper understanding of his characters and appreciate more fully how Hawthorne uses this technique to fully develop and enrich his story.

Beginning with the maiden lady, Hepzibah Pyncheon, Hawthorne introduces this main character and then describes an old dresser whose drawers Hepzibah has to struggle to open. Like this antiquated piece of furniture, Hepzibah creaks and groans, her joints cracking and her loud sighs filling the room with noise. Also like her furniture, or more specifically like the drawers of the dresser, Hepzibah has a hard time opening her heart and soul. She has closed herself off to the outside world and only with difficulty will she open up, even to her soon-to-arrive relative, Phoebe. Hepzibah is a rigid old woman, set in her ways, which Hawthorne describes by mentioning the stiffness of her silk skirt. She is like an old dress, stored in a suitcase filled with mothballs. When she finally opens the door to her room to go downstairs, she releases a deep sigh, which Hawthorne likens to "a gust of chill, damp wind out of a long-closed vault."

Almost everywhere this old woman walks, lives, and breathes, darkness, stiffness, and a sense of being boxed in follow her. She wears black-colored clothes and passes through hallways and rooms that are bleak and darkened by time. Where there once was color in the rugs, there are now only thin and worn-out shades of gray. Doors to rooms around her are locked and bolted. In one room through which Hepzibah passes, Hawthorne purposefully describes a set of chairs that are "straight and stiff, and so ingeniously contrived for the discomfort of the human person that they were irksome even to sight." Hawthorne uses the description of these chairs to further depict the discomfort of Hepzibah's physical and psychological essence. Neither she nor the people who come into her presence are at ease.

Hepzibah is not a worldly woman. She has lived a sheltered life and has seldom left her home. She is like her house, whose front door has not provided entry to stranger or kin for a long time. But necessity forces Hepzibah to make concessions. Although she does not go out into the world, facing it head on, she does admit the public through a side room, the small discarded shop that she has renovated. Because she is desperate for money, Hepzibah will force herself to face the public. But, she does so reluctantly. As she has done with most of her emotions, hiding them in the dark recesses of her psyche, she also will do with her physical self. While Hepzibah has placed herself in a

vulnerable position by inviting the public into her shop, she is not without escape. The shop is connected to her house, allowing her to quickly dart into the confines and the darkness of its privacy whenever her emotions overwhelm her; whenever the public comes too close.

Furthering the relationship between Hepzibah and the shop, Hawthorne informs his readers that a change is taking place. The shop, which had been heavily curtained to keep its interior out of sight, has been recently transformed. The cobwebs and rust have been cleared away. The shelves and bins have been filled with "merchantable goods." Likewise, Hepzibah is experiencing a transformation. She is, in Hawthorne's words, stepping "down from her pedestal of imaginary rank." Hepzibah's life is changing in more ways than she can imagine. One of those major adjustments will come to her in the person of Phoebe Pyncheon, a character who is as bright as Hepzibah is dull. To emphasize this contrast, Hawthorne portrays Hepzibah's first encounter with Phoebe by having Hepzibah stand in a darkened hallway, staring through a "dusty" window to see Phoebe, who is standing outside in the light.

Phoebe, in contrast to Hepzibah, is described as "fresh" and "unconventional" and far too beautiful to have come to this house with its "sordid and ugly luxuriance of gigantic weeds that grew in the angle of the house, and the heavy projection [of the door frame] that overshadowed her." Phoebe brings to this dark and dank home of Hepzibah the exuberance of spring and country air. At first, this throws Hepzibah back into the deep shadows as she considers not only not opening the door but also locking it so Phoebe cannot come in. It is as if Hepzibah realizes in advance that Phoebe's light will affect her, and this idea frightens her. The thought of locking the door to block Phoebe is symbolic of Hepzibah making sure that her own heart and soul remain closed.

Hepzibah, however, gives in and allows Phoebe to enter. Later that night, Phoebe sleeps in a room that is heavy with dark. An old canopy is stretched over the bed, which Hawthorne describes as being like a brooding cloud. However, in the morning, the light steals into the room, and upon finding Phoebe there, Hawthorn states that "the dawn kissed her brow." In other words, Phoebe's appearance has brought the sun into the once-dark house. Hawthorne has positioned this room in which Phoebe will stay as one that overlooks the garden. Phoebe, a country girl, needs the fresh air and sun, just as a flower does. She will, accordingly, spend much of her time in the garden, restoring the health and vigor of the plants and animals she finds there. It is in the garden, too, that Phoebe first meets Mr. Holgrave, a young man she will later marry. Their love blossoms as do the ancient plants that had previously been deteriorating due to a lack of care. In contrast to the negative attributes of the color black that Hawthorne uses to describe the interior of the house, in the garden, the color black designates something positive. Hawthorne describes the fertility of the black soil, which has been enriched from years and years of compost. As Hawthorne puts it, this soil has been enriched by "the decay of a long period of time; such as fallen leaves, the petals of flowers, and the stalks and seed vessels of vagrant and lawless plants." Death and decay in the house, or in Hepzibah's world, is morbid and unhealthy; but in the garden, death is the source of renewed life. The fallen garden debris will provide nutrients for the new plants, much as Phoebe will supply a new source of energy for Hepzibah.

Also in the garden are some chickens, which Hawthorne uses to reflect on the decaying lineage of the Puncheons. These chickens were once a proud breed. Their meat was succulent, and their eggs were of enormous size. But, the fowl have withered over the years and are now gouty. Even their clucking noises sound despondent and depressed. So, too, have the Puncheons withered. Only a few descendants are left. Their fortune is dwindling; their ancestral house is falling apart; and, they have yet to rid themselves of the curse of Matthew Maule, the old wizard from whom the first Puncheon stole property. Like the chickens, the Puncheons are shrinking in size, and their output (like the chicken's once succulent meat and eggs) is paltry in comparison to what it used to be.

But there is hope. Phoebe weeds the flowerbeds and cultivates the heirloom blossoms, encouraging them to perfume the air. As she does so, she weeds the misery out of Hepzibah and her brother, Clifford. "Little Phoebe," writes Hawthorne, "was one of those persons who possess . . . the gift of practical arrangement . . . a kind of natural magic that enables these favored ones to bring out the hidden capabilities of things around them." Phoebe will change and rearrange the lives of Hepzibah and Clifford to the point that they no longer recognize themselves. She will open them up to their potential by just being herself: a young woman full of light and love.

Clifford is another character upon whom Hawthorne throws metaphors through the immediate environment. Clifford, as readers find out toward the conclusion of the novel, was unjustly imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Even upon his release, Clifford remains a prisoner, this time a prisoner of his own psychology. Like Hepzibah, Clifford remains locked up, so to speak, in the house of the seven gables, refusing to, or afraid to, leave the premise. However, there is one delightful scene in which Hawthorne places this brother and sister. It is their short-lived run for freedom upon a train. As the train rushes them from their home to some unknown destination, the usual metaphor of travel, that of taking someone into the future, is turned on its head. Clifford and Hepzibah have so long lived in the past that the train ride they take actually delivers them to the present. So taken by the speed and newness of her situation, Hepzibah asks: "Clifford! Clifford! Is not this a dream?" To which her brother replies: "A dream, Hepzibah . . . on the contrary, I have never been awake before!"

The speed of the train not only takes Clifford to the wide-awake present moment, it inspires his thoughts and moves his tongue. He cannot help but express himself out loud in clear sentences and profound thought. It is as if modern technology, of which Clifford had previously had little experience, stirs him from his somewhat walking-dead state and tries urgently to make up to him all the spirit that was stolen from him by his imprisonment. For a few moments, it is successful. Once Clifford steps off the train and back onto the motionless soil, his exuberance fades a bit, but his life, as he will soon learn, is forever changed. He returns home, as an adult, ready to face his consequences.

As the brother and sister make their way home, Hawthorne turns the reader's attention to young Holgrave, who shares the house of the seven gables. It is interesting to note that although Holgrave lives in this house, he does so only precariously. He stays in a

wing of the house that is shut off from the main portion by doors, locks, and deadbolts. So, too, is Holgrave's existence, in association with the Pyncheons, only vaguely connected. His ancestors' lives are intertwined with those of the Pycheons, but he is not related by blood. His life is related to theirs in about as much as his status as a roomer in the same house with them. He is there. He observes them, hears them, knows them, but that is about as close as he gets. That is, until he meets Phoebe. She is the bridge, the one who rids her family of Holgrave's family curse. Phoebe will undo the locks so the doors can be opened, which is exactly how Hawthorne ends this story.

Hograve and Phoebe decide that the best thing they can do is to open the front doors so the magistrate can enter the house. With the opening of the house, not only does the public enter in, but the Pyncheons are able to go out. Thus ends the long habitation of generations of Pyncheons in the house of the seven gables. Symbolic of this change is the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon that lies on the floor. With the removal of this portrait, light exposes the hidden document of wealth. The iron-clad rule and all the curses of the older generations have been put to rest.

The newest generation, represented by Holgrave and Phoebe, will move to a house made of stone. Such a house, Holgrave claims, will allow future generations to alter the interior "to suit its own taste and convenience." And, the stony façade will add "venerableness to permanence."

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *The House of the Seven Gables*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

An unabridged reading of *The House of Seven Gables* read by Roslyn Alexander is available through http://www.audible.com for purchase. Produced in 1993 by Recorded Books, Inc., this reading runs for over twelve hours.

A second reading of *The House of the Seven Gables*, which runs six hours and is narrated by Joan Allen, is also available. This abridged reading was produced by Dove Audio, Inc. in 1997.

Http://www.audiobooks.com also offers a recorded reading of *The House of Seven Gables* performed by Buck Schirner and produced by Brilliance. This 1995 version runs eleven hours.

J. Searle Dawley directed a silent film adaptation of *The House of the Seven Gables* in 1910. This adaptation starred Mary Fuller as Hepzibah Pyncheon and was produced by the Edison Company.

The House of the Seven Gables was adapted as a film by Joe May in 1940. The adaptation starred George Sanders, Margaret Lindsay, Vincent Price, Dick Foran, Nan Grey, Cecil Kellaway, Alan Napier, Gilbert Emery, Miles Mander, and Charles Trowbridge. Universal Studios re-released the video in June 1998.

In 1951, Robert Montgomery and the production company Neptune produced a fifty-minute adaptation of the novel starring Gene Lockhart, June Lockhart, Leslie Nielson, and Richard Purdy.

In 1963, Admiral released a two-hour production of Hawthorne's works starring Vincent Price. *Twice Told Tales* includes two of Hawthorne's short stories, "Doctor Heidegger's Experiment" and "Rappaccini's Daughter," as well as *The House of the Seven Gables*. Additional cast includes Sebastian Cabot, Mari Blanchard, Beverley Garland, Brett Halsey, Richard Denning, Abraham Sofaer, Joyce Taylor, Edith Evanson, Jacqueline DeWitt, Floyd Simmons, and Gene Roth.

Topics for Further Study

Much has been said by critics about the ways in which Hawthorne's life is evidenced in his fiction. Research Hawthorne's life and discuss which people and events in his life seem to surface in this novel. To what extent do you believe that writing this novel helped Hawthorne explore issues of sin and poverty? After writing this novel, do you think he felt better or worse about his ancestors and current social position?

Some reviewers have been critical of the ending of this novel. Is the pairing of Phoebe and Holgrave believable to you? Does it seem to be too much of a Hollywood ending that neatly cleanses the families of their sordid past? If you could write a new ending, what would you have happen?

Hawthorne states early on that one of the main themes in this novel is that the sins of the past are passed down through generations. Do you agree or disagree? Can you point to any examples in society today where something like crime seems to persist from generation to generation? Can you cite any examples to the contrary where perhaps people have overcome their pasts and made successful lives for themselves?

Hawthorne named this novel after the house in which most of the action takes place. Why do you think he did this? What does the house symbolize? Can you think of any other titles that he might have given the novel?

Watch the 1940 film version of the novel. How does the film differ from the book? If you directed the movie, are there sections of the book that you would emphasize or leave out? How would you decide what to include and what to exclude?

Research the witchcraft trials of 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts. Can you make a case that Colonel Pyncheon may have believed that Matthew Maule was actually a wizard? Or does it seem more likely that the Colonel supported Maule's execution because he wanted to claim Maule's land as his own?

Compare and Contrast

1850: The population of the United States is 23,191,876.

2000s: In 2000, the population of the United States is 281,421,906.

1850: Hawthorne purchases a house in Concord, Massachusetts for $1,500.

2000s: In 2004, with prices ranging from $275,000 to $4.8 million, the average home price in Concord, Massachusetts is $600,000.

1850: Working women often work as shopkeepers, seamstresses, domestic servants, teachers, or hat and fan makers.

2000s: Working women can be found in most every occupation, including corporate management, medicine, dentistry, construction, marketing and communications, trucking, accounting, small business ownership, and software programming.

What Do I Read Next?

One of Hawthorne's best-known and respected novels is *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

Hawthorne self-published his first novel *Fanshawe* in 1828.

Following the publication of *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne completed two additional novels: *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *The Marble Faun* (1860).

Herman Melville and Hawthorne shared a brief friendship from 1850 until 1856. The two reviewed each other's work publicly and even after Hawthorne's death, Melville continued to read and annotate Hawthorne's work. Melville's character Vine in his long poem *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (published by Northwestern University Press in 1991) is believed to be based on Hawthorne.

Another poem by Herman Melville that is believed to be about Hawthorne is "Monody," which first appeared in *Timoleon* (published by Folcroft Library Editions in 1976) and can also be found in *American Poetry : The Nineteenth Century : Herman Melville to Trumbull Stickney, American Indian Poetry, Folk Songs and Spirituals* (published by the Library of America in 1993).

Key Questions

Critics and general readers alike agree that most of Hawthorne's fiction has a quality of "density" about it; that is, the surface tale is related in such a way as to suggest deeper levels of significance. The House of the Seven Gables is no exception. Although the work has all the trappings of a Gothic romance, the story of the curse on the House of Pyncheon appears to most readers to be more serious than its surface details indicate. Careful attention to parallels established between characters, and between characters and setting, as well as allusions to other literary works and events in history, give the novel a richness of meaning which becomes apparent on repeated readings.

1. Hawthorne takes great pains to describe in detail the physical setting for his story, especially the House and its contents; he is also concerned with the physical setting of the town of Salem. How does he use setting as a commentary on the Pyncheon family and on New England society in general?

2. Although most of the novel is told from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, Hawthorne occasionally adopts a more limited perspective, relating events through one or the characters in the story. What is the effect of this technique? What is the novelist trying to achieve by shifting his perspective?

3. Hawthorne is a careful novelist, creating details about his characters which reveal something relevant to one of more of his themes. One example is his choice of professions for Holgrave. Why is it significant that the male protagonist is a daguerrotypist? What evidence suggests the symbolic function of this choice? How does it help illuminate a key theme in the novel?

4. How does Hawthorne use music as a unifying structural device in the novel? What can we learn about characters and themes by paying careful attention to the occurrence of music or to references to music in the narrative?

5. A number of critics have complained about the happy ending of the novel, claiming Hawthorne has not prepared readers adequately for the reversal of fortunes which save his protagonists. Do you agree with these critics, or do you think the writer has given sufficient indication in the text to support the conclusion he has written?

Literary Precedents

Like The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables relies heavily on techniques developed by Gothic novelists during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The House, like the haunted castles in the European versions of Gothic fiction, dominates the landscape and serves as the focal point for the series of sinister and terrifying activities in the story. The novelist also includes a heavy dose of coincidence and a cast of characters bordering on stereotypes. He even uses the device of the interpolated tale, the story of Alice Pyncheon, to add a sense of mystery to his tale.

A number of critics have pointed out parallels between the novel and John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, a seventeenth-century allegory describing the journey of a good Christian to heaven.

As he does in much of his other work, Hawthorne makes frequent allusions to Biblical figures and events; these add resonance to the text and suggest a wider range of significance for the events of the tale.

The House of the Seven Gables is also heavily reminiscent of Greek tragedy.

The Pyncheon family, like a number of Greek families represented in the dramas of Sophocles and Aeschylus, suffers from a curse brought on by the behavior of an ancestor who seeks to gain advantage over his neighbor by immoral methods. The descendants of Governor Pyncheon, who built his house on property swindled from his nemesis Matthew Maule, are doomed to live out the prophesy that the sins of the fathers will be visited upon the children for generations. The fate of Hepzibah and Clifford Pyncheon is similar to that of Greek figures such as the descendants of Atreus.

Further Study

Boswell, Jeanetta, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Critics: A Checklist of Criticism, 1900—1978*, Rowman & Littlefield, 1982.

As the title suggests, this volume provides a selection of criticism about Hawthorne through the greater part of the twentieth century.

Martin, Terrence, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, rev. ed., Twayne Publishers, 1983.

In addition to providing biographical information, Martin explores Hawthorne's major works.

Mellow, James R., *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*, Houghton Mifflin, 1980.

Mellow's biography is an important resource for all students interested in learning more about Hawthorne and his contemporaries.

Person, Leland S., *A Historical Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by Larry J. Reynolds, Oxford University Press, 2001.

In addition to providing bibliographic information, Person's collection of essays includes a chapter about mesmerism in *The House of the Seven Gables*, a chapter about Hawthorne and history, and an illustrated chronology of history that maps Hawthorne's life to relevant historical events.

Rosenthal, Bernard, ed. *Critical Essays on Hawthorne's "The House of the Seven Gables,"* G. K. Hall, 1995.

In this collection of essays, Rosenthal provides readers with an in-depth and readable look at one of Hawthorne's best known novels.

Scharnhorst, Gary, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: An Annotated Bibliography of Comment and Criticism before 1900*, Scarecrow Press, 1988.

This volume provides a comprehensive bibliography for criticism about Hawthorne's works through 1900. Each entry includes a brief quote from the article. All mentions of the *The House of the Seven Gables* can be conveniently found through the index, which cross references the entries by topic.

Wagenknecht, Edward, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Man, His Tales and Romances*, Ungar, 1989.

Wagenknecht takes a close look at the relationship between Hawthorne's life and his fiction, including a section dedicated to *The House of the Seven Gables*.

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In this lengthy biography of Hawthorne, Wineapple traces the writer's life□his marriage, friendships, politics, religious beliefs, and career□to its end in 1864.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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