

The House of the Seven Gables



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**Lesson: The House of the Seven
Gables**

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Nathaniel Hawthorne

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE (1804-1864)

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts. His father, Captain Nathaniel Hawthorne died in 1808 in Dutch Guiana when his son was only four. After his father's death, his mother moved with the young Nathaniel and his two sisters Elizabeth and Maria Louisa to her brothers' house.

Hawthorne was forced to stop his regular schooling at the age of nine due to an injury on his foot. He was home-schooled during this time and used it to read authors like Shakespeare, Spenser and Bunyan. The family shifted to Sebago Lake, Maine. Hawthorne recalls this time of his life as idyllic, when he enjoyed staying in the outdoors. In 1819, at his uncle's behest, he returned to Salem to begin preparing for college entrances.

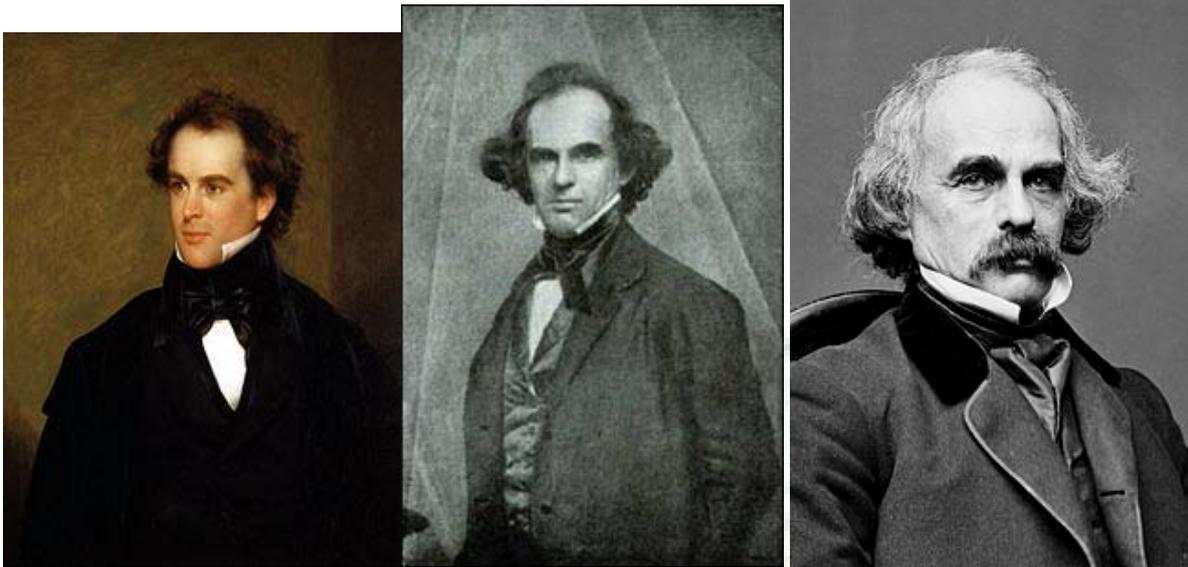
That's Interesting!

Hawthorne added the 'w' to his surname after his graduation from college ostensibly to make the spelling more in conformity with the way it was pronounced. However, he may also have done it to distance himself from his ancestor John Hathorne, who was one of the judges at the Salem Witch Trials, for which Hawthorne nursed tremendous guilt.

In 1821 Hawthorne joined Bowdoin College. He graduated in 1825. In college, Hawthorne made several friends who would later become famous (More about them later!). During the next twelve years (between 1825 and 1837), he remained in Salem at his mother's house on Charter Street. He spent his time reading about American History and writing. He also travelled often around New England, since his uncle ran a stagecoach service which allowed him to travel free. Critics have always wondered about this twelve year period of apparent reclusiveness. He wrote his first novel during this time. *Fanshawe: A Tale* was published in 1828 at his own expense. Later, he recalled and destroyed all the copies of this novel.

His first story, "The Hollow of the Three Hills" was published in the *Salem Gazette* in 1830. Subsequently, several of his stories were published in magazines. Most of these stories were anonymous, so Hawthorne gained a name as a writer only in 1837, when his college friend Horatio Bridge helped him to publish his collection of stories, *Twice-Told Tales*.

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a. Portrait of Hawthorne by Charles Osgood, 1841. b. Daguerreotype of Hawthorne by Whipple and Black in 1848 c. Hawthorne's photograph in the 1860's

Source: www.wikipedia.com

Hawthorne became editor of the *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* in 1836. After his engagement to Sophia Peabody in 1839, he took up a job in the Custom House in Boston in a bid to save some money for his marriage. He resigned in 1841 when there was a change in the government. He then began working at the Brook Farm Community at West Roxbury. Hawthorne hoped that this would enable him to accumulate money for his marriage. Yet, the taxing hours and the financial losses made him resign from here too.

Hawthorne married Sophia Peabody on July 9, 1842 and began living at the famous "Old Manse" in Concord, Massachusetts—the house which they rented from Ralph Waldo Emerson! He began contributing to the *Democratic Review* at Boston. The Hawthornes had two children, Una (named after Spenser's *Faerie Queen*) and Julian. Financial constraints forced Hawthorne to get a job as a Surveyor at the Port of Salem. He lost this job in 1848 due to a change in government.

In the next few months, in which he resumed writing, he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, which was published in 1849. Hawthorne

had to deal with the anger of certain people from Salem who were upset with some portions

And You thought Piracy is a Present Day Problem!

Although *The Scarlet Letter* was a huge success and sold many copies, Hawthorne was not able to earn well from it because it was pirated by two publishers in London!

In May 1849, Hawthorne and his family moved from Salem to Lennox, where they lived in the "Little Red House". Their stay here was significant for many reasons. It was here that Hawthorne wrote *The House of the Seven Gables*. His second daughter, Rose, was born in this house. Most significantly, however, it was here that Hawthorne met Herman Melville. Melville was writing *Moby Dick* during

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this time, and Hawthorne's deep influence on him is obvious in the fact that he dedicated the novel to Hawthorne.

After a brief stint at West Newton, during which Hawthorne published *The Blithedale Romance* and *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*, Hawthorne bought a house from Bronson Alcott in Concord. He named it 'The Wayside'. It was here that he wrote *Tanglewood Tales* and *A Life of Pierce*. The latter was a campaign biography for his college classmate. When Pierce became President, Hawthorne was rewarded for his biography with a diplomatic appointment at Liverpool in England. In 1857, Hawthorne resigned and the family travelled to Italy. It was during this trip that Hawthorne worked on *The Marble Faun*, his last complete work.

In 1860, the Hawthornes returned to the United States. The family resumed living in 'The Wayside' Hawthorne's health began to decline. A trip to Havana with his friend W.D Ticknor was cancelled and they went to Philadelphia instead. Ticknor died of pneumonia there, and this greatly affected Hawthorne. A month later, on May 19, 1864, he died in his sleep on a visit to New Hampshire with Pierce. He is buried at the Sleepy Hollow cemetery in Concord.

THE CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS OF HAWTHORNE'S WRITING

Hawthorne's fiction is marked by the use of lengthy visual descriptions. The narrator tends to be a third person omniscient narrator, which helps in keeping the reader informed about situations. According to Arthur Compton-Rickett, there are three distinct characteristics in Hawthorne's writing. They are his sense of mystery, his gift of fantasy and his intellectual detachment (Compton-Rickett 624). His sense of mystery allows him to present an unfamiliar aspect of the familiar. The descriptions of the house, in *The House of the Seven Gables* make it seem eerie and forbidding, while it is actually just an old house. His descriptions heighten the beauty of everyday, ordinary things.

Hawthorne uses Fantasy to great effect too. The ghosts of the Maules, the frequent strains of Alice Pyncheon's harpsichord and the parade of dead Pyncheons in the text are examples of the fantastical. Yet, Hawthorne presents these episodes in a way that does not detract from the reality of the novel. The fantastical elements can be read as dream-sequences too, which add colour and insight into the main narrative.

"He has the hand of an artist, but the soul of the scientist" is what Compton-Rickett says to explain Hawthorne's intellectual detachment (Compton-Rickett 627). The descriptive narrative of the Judge's death is a fine example of this. The finality of death is stressed upon when each of the Judge's achievements are outlined, only to highlight the dead Judge's body slumped lifelessly. It is ironic that the Judge, who had such great pretensions, is reduced to such a sad state in death.

HAWTHORNE'S PURITAN SENSIBILITIES

Puritanism does not encourage fiction, shunning it as frivolous and shallow. There have been very few Puritan writers who have been successful. In England, John Bunyan and John Milton are two

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examples. Hawthorne read these authors as a child. Hawthorne's Puritan sensibilities come through in his writing too. His religious belief is reflected in his themes and style of writing and one can see a distinct religious note in his work. His Puritan sensibilities reflect in his choice of subjects—whether in his novels or his short stories. Sin and its consequences are the main theme in all his works. In *The Scarlet Letter* the theme is of illegitimacy and the guilt of illicit passion, whereas *The House of the Seven Gables* brings up the suffering of generations due to the covetousness of their ancestor.

IMPORTANT SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

NEW ENGLAND



A painting by Robert Walter Weir which depicts the arrival of the first Pilgrims to the United States: "The Embarkation of the Pilgrims" (1857)

Source: www.wikipedia.com

New England is the name given to the earliest English settlements in America. It presently comprises of the six states of Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Vermont. The early Pilgrim Fathers settled here in 1620. By 1630 the first groups of Puritans came and settled in America, chiefly around Boston. New England has always been a centre of political, social and intellectual activity. The famous Boston Tea Party was a protest against the British Parliament's decision to levy extra taxes. Most traditions of American literature and philosophy began in New England. New England played a pivotal role in the abolition of Slavery, and also saw the first effect of the Industrial Revolution. Even today, the state maintains a unique cultural identity, distinct from the other American states, with Puritanism and an agrarian lifestyle being its highlights.

The early settlers of New England were Puritans who had fled from England due to religious persecution. Ironically, these Puritans themselves established very narrow laws in the New World. Non-protestants like Jews and Quakers were persecuted against. Women had very few rights, and were considered the property of their husbands. A lot of this historical background serves as the base for Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS

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One of Hawthorne's ancestors, John Hathorne, had been a judge in the Salem Witch trials in the 1692, and he had always felt a huge sense of guilt about this. This sense of guilt exhibits itself in both *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*.



Examination of a Witch (1853), by T. H. Matteson

Source: www.wikipedia.com

Between February 1692 and May 1693, several people were prosecuted for Witchcraft in Massachusetts. About twenty people were executed and most of these trials took place in Salem. The state was governed by a conservative Puritan government. The Puritans followed the influences of Calvinism and shunned any form of music, dance or other entertainment as they were seen as pagan in nature. Any deviance from the norm was seen as witchery, and this caused several people, especially women, to be persecuted for witchcraft. Hawthorne uses this as a central theme in *The Scarlet Letter*. In *The House of the Seven Gables* too, Matthew Maule is convicted and hanged for Witchcraft. Colonel Pyncheon frames Maule in order to get hold of his land. Since he is one of the judges of the trial, he is able to do so.

INTRODUCTION TO *The House of the Seven Gables*

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* was published in 1851. Its literary complexity makes it difficult to for one to classify it as a romance or a gothic novel or as a fantasy or a realist work. Hawthorne himself calls it a Romance, not a novel, in his preface. Yet, diverse elements in the narrative make it an interesting mix of all these genres. Although most readers find *The Scarlet Letter* a more engaging novel, Hawthorne considered *The House of the Seven Gables* his more superior work.

The novel gives an insight into the world of New England in the nineteenth century. Hawthorne accurately depicts life in Salem, Massachusetts during this time. His own experiences and sensibilities contribute to the realistic elements of the novel as he draws from the history of his own ancestors, who were Puritans settled in New England. His ancestors were strict in their religious ideas, and an early ancestor of Hawthorne's, William Hathorne, was instrumental in religious persecution. John Hathorne, another ancestor, was one of the three judges at the Salem witchcraft trials. These aspects of his background influence the subjects and style of Hawthorne's writing. Both his most famous novels, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, reflect the sense of guilt he has over his own forefather being a part of this mindless religious persecution.

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THE ACTUAL HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

Hawthorne was inspired by his cousin Susannah Ingersoll's house in Salem, Massachusetts when he conceived the seven-gabled house in his book. The house is a 17th century structure with seven gables in it. It was originally owned by Captain John Turner. During the infamous Salem witch-trials, his son, John Turner Jr. built a secret staircase for the safety of his sisters. This added to the mysterious aura of the sprawling house. Samuel Ingersoll bought the house from the Turner family and left it to his daughter Susannah Ingersoll. Hawthorne was Susannah's second cousin, and visited the house often. Although at the time he visited it, the house had only three gables left, Susannah would describe the original house to him, and this inspired Hawthorne to create the ancestral house of the Pyncheons.



A view of the original Turner-Ingersoll residence. Source: www.wikipedia.com

Presently, the house Hawthorne was born in has also been shifted opposite the House of the Seven Gables, and they have been made into a museum. The house has tours about not just Nathaniel Hawthorne's life and times, but also recreates the atmosphere of the books *The House of the Seven Gables*, including the shop Hepzibah opens under one of the gables.

THE PREFACE TO *The House of the Seven Gables*

Hawthorne announces in his Preface that his book should be read as a Romance, and not a novel. He claims that he wants to portray the "truth of the human heart". This truth can be expressed only through imagination. Romance, unlike a novel, will allow him to explore truth by using fantastical elements. He tells the reader that the theme of the novel is that wrong and retribution is passed down across generations. Thus, the novel is a warning to readers against coveting "ill-gotten gold, or real estate." He also warns the reader against thinking of the story as anything other than fiction.

THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES AND THE QUESTION OF GENRE

The House of the Seven Gables can be classified under several heads. The dark, brooding atmosphere it creates makes it a Gothic novel. The sense of dread and the frequent references to supernatural occurrences are common features of a Gothic novel. The house is described as "bearing the traces

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not merely of outward storm and sunshine, but expressive, also, of the long lapse of mortal life” (Hawthorne 7). Further, the old curse the house has borne for centuries and the mysterious misfortune that strikes generations of Pyncheons add to the Gothic element of the novel. The supernatural elements are also part of the Gothic genre. It is said that at midnight, all the ghosts of dead Pyncheons gather in the parlour. However, uncharacteristically for a gothic story, the book ends on a positive note.

In his preface to the novel, Hawthorne asserts that his book is more a Romance than a novel. This gives him leeway to work in supernatural elements into his work. The obvious advantage of writing a romance is that it would allow more creative interpretations of character and situation as opposed to a novel. Further, Hawthorne had the freedom to delve into the realm of the supernatural and fantasy.

F.O. Mathiessen calls Hawthorne’s use of ambiguity a ‘multiple choice’ (Mathiessen). Although he uses the term for *The Scarlet Letter*, one can see this in his short stories as well. In *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne employs ambiguity in his treatment of the supernatural. All the incidents of the supernatural are mostly narrated with a disclaimer from the author that the choice lies with the reader whether or not to believe it. For instance, right after Judge Pyncheon’s death, there is a procession of ghosts of dead Pyncheons, who come to see the portrait of the Colonel and attempt at finding a treasure around it. The “visionary scene” gives additional information, not yet known to the characters of the book, that Judge Pyncheon’s son is dead, and so Hepzibah and Clifford will inherit the property. Hawthorne cautions us not to think of the supernatural element as “an actual part of our story” but as shadows which are “reflected in the looking-glass”.

Alice Pyncheon’s story forms part of the supernatural element in the novel. Hawthorne portrays Alice as a simple girl who is caught in the web of the Pyncheon curse. Her beauty is compared to the flowers she has planted, and the scent of flowers. Hawthorne writes, “The fragrance of her rich and delightful character lingered....as a dried rosebud scents the drawer where it has withered and perished” (Hawthorne 79). Just as the scent, Alice still haunts the house she has lived in. Like the white roses she has planted, she too is pure and innocent. When Phoebe and Holgrave declare their love for each other, Alice’s Posies bloom. The breaking of the Maule curse resolves Alice’s pain too. At the end of the novel Uncle Venner hears the harpsichord’s music when they leave the house. Up to now her ghost could be heard playing the harpsichord at any Pyncheon death. The music at the end of the novel symbolises Alice’s happiness for Phoebe and Holgrave and an end of Maule’s curse.

The distinction he is making is between “ordinary, everyday things” which one reads of in a novel, and the fantastic element, which allows a Romance to present the larger truths of life. Interestingly though, Hawthorne covers the fantastical elements in the novel in the garb of visions or dreams. The vision of the ghosts of the Maules confronting the spirit of Colonel Pyncheon is Alice’s. The parade of ghosts around Judge Pyncheon’s body is part of the narrative. With no actual witnesses, it is mere speculation. Thus, while he claims to write a Romance, he creates a work which provides a realistic and gripping read. Richard Chase, in his essay entitled “The Broken Circuit”, opines that the tradition of romance is so embedded in American literature that “the distinction itself may sometimes be meaningless as applied to a given book...which might more accurately be called a ‘romance’ or a “romance-novel” (Chase 12). Although Hawthorne prides in calling his work romance, Chase feels

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that Hawthorne's choice of genre was a limiting factor for him. He says, "although Hawthorne was a superb writer of romance and a considerable novelist...he was aware that his romances, as he himself insisted on calling them, proceeded in part from his final failure to take a place among the great novelists"(Chase 87).

THE THEME OF SIN AND RETRIBUTION AND THE IDEA OF FATE IN THE NOVEL

Hawthorne's Puritan sensibilities shape the subject of his writing. A constant preoccupation of both his novels and shorter fiction is Sin. *The Scarlet Letter* is concerned with sinful passion, while *The House of the Seven Gables* highlights the lingering effect of evil across generations. Hawthorne makes the moral of the book clear in the Preface itself, when he suggests that the sin of one Pyncheon shall cause misfortune to subsequent generations. Avarice and Pride will surely bring about downfall.

He picks the psychological aspect of Sin, and concentrates on the character's circumstance. So, even while there is a didactic aim in his work, it is interesting as he shows his characters grappling with doubt, rather than sermonising on the wrong-doing. Arthur Dimmesdale's remorse in *The Scarlet Letter* is intense, while the Pyncheon family's retribution, which follows generations, is the gripping pivot of the entire book.

Hawthorne brings up the debate of Fate versus Free Will in the novel. By depicting generations of Pyncheons repeatedly suffering due to Matthew Maule's curse, he does seem to suggest that destiny plays a role in people's lives. Ever since Matthew Maule cursed the Colonel—God will give him blood to drink—the Pyncheons face tragedy. Even though they are successful, they die sudden, unexpected deaths. The most recent Pyncheon to be cursed in the novel is Clifford. He has spent thirty years suffering in prison for no fault of his.

However, though he argues for Fate against Free Will, Hawthorne does introduce some positivity towards the end of the book, which suggests that Fate can be overcome by Hope. This hope is presented in the character of Phoebe. The gloomy atmosphere of the house lifts with Phoebe's arrival. Her sunny disposition makes both Hepzibah and Clifford take kindly to her. Phoebe works hard to restore the garden. She helps to fix the summerhouse and mend the chicken coops. The suggestion is clear—Fate can be overcome by a positive attitude. Linked to this is Holgrave's expression of love for Phoebe. He is clearly influenced by her positivity and their union suggests the end of the rivalry between the two families.

HAWTHORNE'S USE OF SYMBOLS

Symbols are used in literature to represent something—usually, an object may be used to represent an abstract concept. A symbol may be a simple substitution or work through a more complex comparison. Hawthorne is a master of symbolism *The Scarlet Letter* is seen as the first American

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symbolic novel. Not only does Hawthorne use objects as symbols, he excels in making his characters work as symbols too. For instance, Hepzibah and Clifford's present condition is symbolic of the curse on the Pyncheons. Phoebe acts as a complete foil to them and offers a sunny contrast, symbolic of positivity and happiness. Finally Phoebe and Holgrave's marriage at the end symbolises the end of the Maule-Pyncheon family feud.

Some obvious symbols in the book are:

The House:

The house is a central symbol in the book. It represents the Pyncheon family fortunes. The decline of the family is represented by the dilapidated condition of the house. Clifford speaks of the house as a dungeon which offers no comfort to its residents. The brooding descriptions of the house lend a mysterious quality to it. The house becomes a warning against sin. The building of the house is the cause of all the problems that subsequent Pyncheons face. Instead of being a haven or a source of solace, the house becomes dreary and dreadful.

The house also suggests downfall. When Judge Pyncheon has set up a country estate away from the family house, he is successful. Yet, when he comes back to it, in search of Clifford and a treasure, it leads to his downfall too.

The Chickens:

Like the house, the chickens symbolise the fortunes of the Pyncheon family. In happier times, the chickens were robust and as big as turkeys. Their size has now dwindled. It is suggested that with the change in the fortunes of Hepzibah and Clifford, their lot will improve too. Phoebe's efforts to mend the chicken coop suggest that just as her arrival at the house has influenced Hepzibah and Clifford, so also she will influence other aspects of the house. Clifford suggests that the chickens should be set free, implying the importance of freedom. This also ties up with the influence of Transcendentalism on Hawthorne's writing.

The portrait of Colonel Pyncheon:

All the Pyncheons face suffering because of the sins committed by Colonel Pyncheon. His covetousness resulted in Matthew Maule's death. Maule cursed the colonel before he died, that "God will give him blood to drink". Subsequent generations of Pyncheons also suffer due to this curse. The portrait thus, serves as a warning to the Pyncheons—that the Wages of Sin is Death! Ironically, it is this very portrait that has the deeds of the land in Maine hidden behind it.

The evil spirit that haunts the house resides in the portrait. The portrait is symbolic of the guilt of Colonel Pyncheon. The fact that Judge Pyncheon resembles the portrait so much points to the continued legacy of tragedy that the Pyncheons have to bear. Hepzibah feels a fear of the portrait and Clifford is so repulsed by it that he asks Hepzibah to cover it with a curtain.

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SOME IMPORTANT CHARACTER SKETCHES

Hepzibah Pyncheon

Hepzibah Pyncheon is a sixty year old spinster who has been living in The House of the Seven Gables for the past thirty years. Her brother Clifford has just been released from prison, and has come to stay with her. Judge Pyncheon and Phoebe's father are her cousins. Due to her financial constraints, she has kept Holgrave as a tenant in her house. She has also opened a small shop in one of the gables of the house. This is a cause of concern for her, since she thinks it is below her station to be engaged in trade. Her general facial expression is a scowl, though she is not bad at heart.

Clifford Pyncheon

Clifford Pyncheon has just come out of prison at the opening of the novel. He was framed by his cousin Judge Pyncheon for the death of their uncle Jaffrey Maule. Thirty years in prison have made him reclusive and unsure of himself.

Phoebe

Seventeen year old Phoebe has come to stay with Hepzibah. She is able to transform the mood of the elder Pyncheons by her happy nature. She offers a contrast to Hepzibah, both in age and nature. Her happy disposition makes the shop run more successfully than with Hepzibah. She marries Holgrave at the end of the novel, symbolically ending the long standing feud between the Maules and the Pyncheons and lifting Matthew Maule's curse from her family.

Holgrave

Holgrave is Hepzibah's tenant. He is a daguerreotypist, a kind of photographer, and makes a daguerreotype of Judge Pyncheon when he dies. Holgrave is actually a descendent of Matthew Maule, and just as Matthew Maule had hypnotised Alice Pyncheon, Holgrave hypnotises Phoebe. Unlike Matthew, Holgrave does not take advantage of her mesmerised state and brings her back to her senses.

Judge Pyncheon

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Judge Pyncheon is scheming and greedy. Despite being successful and well-off, he is still in search of the 'treasure' which he feels Clifford knows the key to. He hopes to become the Governor of the state, but he dies suddenly in the House of the Seven Gables.

Uncle Venner

Uncle Venner is an old labourer who seems to be the only villager the Pyncheon family is on good terms with. He is a simple and kind man and provides a foil to the eccentric Pyncheons. At the end of the novel he moves into Judge Pyncheon's country house with them.

Colonel Pyncheon

Colonel Pyncheon was the original Pyncheon. He had Matthew Maule convicted wrongly for witchcraft just to acquire his land. Maule's curse, "God will give him blood to drink", ensures that though he builds a house, he cannot enjoy living in it, and dies on the day it is opened. The portrait that hangs in the house is his.

Matthew Maule

Matthew Maule was hanged for witchcraft and lost his land to Pyncheon. When he is hanged for witchcraft, he curses the Pyncheon family, and this forms the bedrock of the cycle of sin and retribution that follows in the coming generations of Pyncheons.

Matthew Maule

The second Matthew Maule is the first one's grandson. He is a carpenter and he has the power to mesmerise. He is instrumental in Alice Pyncheon's death. This episode is another example of the continued antagonism between the two families.

Alice Pyncheon

Alice Pyncheon's character contributes to the supernatural element of the novel. She had brought seeds from Europe and planted them. These flowers are called Alice's Posies in her memory. She dies of a cold she catches because she gets drenched at Matthew Maule's wedding. He mesmerises her to come to his bridal shower and wait on his bride.

After her death, her ghost remains in The House of the Seven Gables, since she has undergone so much pain in her life.

Jaffrey Pyncheon

Jaffrey Pyncheon was the uncle of Judge Pyncheon, Hepzibah and Clifford. His death is natural, but Judge Pyncheon blames it on Clifford. His character is one of the many Pyncheons who suffer due to Maule's curse.

SUMMARY

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Hawthorne establishes the genre of *The House of the Seven Gables* as a Romance in his Preface. He calls it a Romance, as opposed to a novel, which deals with the everyday. The major theme of the novel is going to be that sin and retribution can be passed on from generation to generation.

Hawthorne issues a disclaimer about the people and places in the novel being fictional, yet there are obvious hints to suggest that some characters are indeed based on actual people that Hawthorne knew. There are obvious references to the Salem Witch hunts as well.

The novel opens in the mid-1600's in Massachusetts. Matthew Maule has built a small house on land which Colonel Pyncheon had an eye on. In a bid to snatch the land, Pyncheon gets Maule hanged for witchcraft. Dying, Maule says to Pyncheon, that God will give him blood to drink. This curse remains with the family for generations. Colonel Pyncheon builds a house on the land, and has a grand party to celebrate. This is the house of the seven gables, from which the novel derives its name.

Interestingly, Maule's son helps in the designing of the house. On the day of the party, the guests discover the colonel dead, covered in blood.

The Pyncheon family is cursed further. After Colonel Pyncheon's death, they are not able to claim land in Maine as they do not have any papers to stake ownership. Another member of the family, Jaffrey Pyncheon, is killed and Clifford Pyncheon, his nephew is jailed for life for his murder. His other nephew establishes himself as a judge, and builds himself a house outside the town. Hepzibah, Clifford's sister, continues to live in the House of the Seven Gables.

At the start of the action, Hepzibah has opened a small shop in one of the gables of the house to earn a living. She keeps a lodger, Holgrave, who we are introduced to when he comes to her shop. Her rich cousin Judge Pyncheon and Uncle Venner also pay a visit. Phoebe, a distant cousin of Hepzibah's, comes to stay with her. Despite Hepzibah's initial reluctance to keep her at her house, Phoebe manages to convince her to allow her to stay. Phoebe's arrival changes the atmosphere at the House. She helps Hepzibah both at home and at the shop. Hepzibah shows her the old Colonel Pyncheon's portrait and tells her that her brother Clifford is the master of the house. She tells Phoebe about the stories associated with the house, including the legend of how a treasure may be hidden in the house and the belief that the spirit of an ancestor, Alice Pyncheon, haunted the house. Hepzibah also talks to Phoebe about Holgrave. Holgrave is a daguerreotypist.

Phoebe interacts with Holgrave to find that he is not as strange as Hepzibah's warnings had suggested. She likes his company and he in turn is impressed by her care of the chickens in the garden. He is surprised that the chickens accept her, unlike their dislike of him. The chickens are the few left of what the Pyncheons used to breed. The Pyncheons used to breed chickens which were fabled to be as big as turkeys.

Holgrave shows Phoebe a daguerreotype which she thinks is Colonel Pyncheon, though it is actually his nephew Judge Pyncheon. Holgrave shows it to her to explain how a daguerreotype can show emotions deeper than what is depicted. He points out how, though the man is smiling, there appears to be deceit and crookery hidden behind his smile.

Phoebe meets Clifford, Hepzibah's brother, who has been released after 30 years in prison. He is deeply disturbed by his experience, though he takes kindly to Phoebe. Phoebe also meets Judge

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Pyncheon, but dislikes him at once. She notices his facial similarity with the portrait of the Colonel, and realises it is he whose daguerreotype Holgrave had shown her.

Phoebe's presence is a huge comfort to both Hepzibah and Clifford. She helps in the shop and is liked by the customers. She reads to Clifford and takes him out to the garden. Hepzibah is happy with the solace Phoebe brings to Clifford, and she begins to hold lunches on Sunday afternoon with Phoebe and Uncle Venner. Though he is quiet most of the time, Clifford is lively and speaks often in these lunches. Hepzibah is happy that she is able to give Clifford some happiness after the hardships he has faced.

Clifford begins to adjust to life in the house. He enjoys spending time with Phoebe, watching people and new kinds of vehicles pass by, from the gable in front of the gate. One day he sees a man with a monkey and a diorama. The narrator comments on the futility of the life of the characters depicted in the diorama. Whatever they do, they become lifeless once the music stops. Another day, he is excited to see a procession pass his house. He even sees Judge Pyncheon passing one day, and is terrified.

Holgrave discusses the Maule curse on the Pyncheons with Phoebe. He tells her the curse seems to be responsible for lunacy in the family. Phoebe rejects his idea. He reads an article he has written for a magazine about the Maule curse on the Pyncheons to Phoebe. He tells Phoebe about the grandson of Colonel Pyncheon, Gervayse, who summons a carpenter Matthew Maule who is a descendent of the Matthew Maule who had cursed his grandfather. Gervayse was in search of the papers which would prove his ownership of some land in Maine. These deeds were missing since the time the house was being built. Maule declines to help him at first, but later accepts on the condition that he would get the house if he found the land deeds for Gervayse. Maule meets and hypnotises Alice, Gervayse's daughter, and summons the ghosts of previous Pyncheons through her. He claims that the Colonel refuses to divulge the place the deeds have been hidden. Maule then continues to hypnotise Alice, and inadvertently causes her death when he summons her to his wedding in the cold. Holgrave realises that his rendition of the tale has the same mesmerising effect on Phoebe as Maule had had on Alice.

Phoebe leaves for her home for a few days. During this time, both Clifford and Hepzibah find it hard to live in the house. They both feel dejected and feel Phoebe's absence. Judge Pyncheon visits them in a bid to meet Clifford. Hepzibah declines his offer of help again and refuses to allow him to meet Clifford. Judge Pyncheon is angry, and tells Hepzibah that he wants to meet Clifford because he believes Clifford knows where the deeds of the land in Maine are hidden in the house. Hepzibah does not believe the Judge but goes to fetch Clifford. She wonders if he would know anything on her way to his room. She is shocked to find that Clifford is not in his room, and rushes out in panic. When she screams to the Judge for help, he does not respond. He has died suddenly on the chair. Clifford tells Hepzibah they are now free of him, but when she realises he is dead, she instinctively flees the scene with Clifford.

In the chapter entitled 'The Flight of Two Owls', they catch a train to run away, as Hepzibah is scared that they might be implicated in Judge Pyncheon's death. In the train, Clifford is surprisingly animated, and talks with gusto with the passenger next to him. He speaks of the wonder of trains,

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and how they encourage people to travel. He tells his fellow passenger how he feels houses are restrictive and to be 'nomadic' is a better situation.

Chapter 18 has supernatural elements. The narrative speaks of all the engagements Judge Pyncheon is missing, the most important one being a dinner where the Judge had hoped to nominate himself as Governor of Massachusetts. A series of ghosts, all descendants of Colonel Pyncheon, march by the Judge's body. They look around the room, as if searching for something, and then leave, disappointed, since none of them finds anything. Even the Judge's son, with whom he has fallen out, walks past. This episode is brought to an abrupt halt with the ringing of the shop bell.

Uncle Venner passes the house but Holgrave tells him there is no one at home. Customers to the shop and the butcher all ring the bell but leave when it is unanswered. The judge's horse is still outside the house. Phoebe returns and as she is about to enter the house, Ned Higgins shouts out a warning to her not to enter. She meets Holgrave inside, who shows her the daguerreotype he has made of the Judge after his death. Holgrave has not informed the police of the judge's death since he is sure Hepzibah and Clifford will be blamed for it due to their absence. He tells Phoebe how Clifford was blamed for Jeffrey Pyncheon's death because of Judge Pyncheon. Although he had died of apoplexy, the judge made it appear as if Clifford had killed him.

Holgrave and Phoebe express their love for each other in these strange circumstances. Hepzibah and Clifford return to the house.

Since the Judge's son has died, all the Pyncheon property will now go to Clifford. When Clifford mentions to Holgrave that he always believed the portrait had a treasure, Holgrave pushes a lever near the portrait, which reveals a parchment paper. This parchment gives the Pyncheons the rights over the land in Maine. Clifford and Hepzibah decide to live in Judge Pyncheon's house. Holgrave, Phoebe and Uncle Venner also move in with them. The book closes with Uncle Venner imagining he can hear Alice Pyncheon playing her harpsichord.

GLOSSARY

CALVINISM: Calvinism is a branch of Protestants who broke away from the Catholic church. They are called the Reformists as well and follow the teachings of John Calvin and other reformist thinkers.

DAGUERREOTYPE: A now obsolete method of photography which was invented in 1839. In this process, a picture was made on a silver surface sensitized with iodine and developed by exposure to mercury vapours.

DAGUERREOTYPIST: A photographer who uses this technique. In the novel, Holgrave is a daguerreotypist.

GABLE: A triangular section of a wall which is usually above an arched door or window at the end of a pitched roof. It stands between the two slopes of the roof.

GOTHIC: A style of fiction that relates to the mysterious and the grotesque.

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PAGANISM: A pagan is a person who does not practise Christianity, Judaism or Islam. Thus, paganism is a term used for all religions other than these three. Paganism may be seen as a counter to Christianity.

PURITANISM: The Puritans were a section of English Protestants who were formed in 1558. They include the Calvinists. They sought to move away from the excesses of Catholicism, and believed in a more personal relationship with God. They encouraged conformity with the Bible and a shunning of personal comfort. They believed that if man did God's will and lived a hard life, he would receive future happiness. Religious persecution led a section of English Puritans to flee to America. They were the first settlers in America, and are called the Pilgrim Fathers.

ROMANCE: A Romance is a work of fiction which depicts heroic, fantastic or supernatural events. They are usually presented in a historical or fantastical setting.

SUPERNATURAL: The Supernatural is that which exists above and beyond nature. In literature, whatever cannot be explained by science and is associated with mysticism, occultism or any other unknown entity, is termed supernatural.

TRANSCENDENTALISM: A religious and philosophical movement which began in the early nineteenth century in America. They believed that people and nature are essentially good, and it is society which corrupts them. Organised religion and politics are two main institutions they targeted. Transcendentalists laid a heavy emphasis on self-reliance and independence. A community can flourish only with such committed individuals.

SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Hawthorne calls his novel a Romance. Do you think he is justified? What genre would you place *The House of the Seven Gables* in and why?

Justify Hepzibah's constant refusal to accept the Judge's help. How do you read the judge's character in the light of her attitude towards him.

Who according to you is the main protagonist of *The House of the Seven Gables*?

How does the relationship between Holgrave and Phoebe contribute to the plot of the novel?

Attempt a critical analysis on Clifford's character.

How does the theme of Sin and Retribution in the novel reflect Hawthorne's Puritan sensibilities and his own personal history?

Discuss Hawthorne's use of symbols with examples from *The House of the Seven Gables*.

What is the significance of Uncle Venner in the novel?

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WEBLINKS

- a. An old adaptation of *The House of the Seven Gables* on the Shirley Temple show is available on YouTube. It stars Shirley Temple as Phoebe, Robert Culp as Holgrave, Agnes Moorehead as Hepzibah, Jonathan Harris as the judge, John Abbot as Uncle Venner and Martin Landau as Clifford. Though this is an obviously old adaptation, it is faithful to the text of the novel. The costumes and setting are quite close to what they would have been Hawthorne's time. This adaptation captures the essence of the Gothic in the novel. It is in four parts:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkFBYe8g96E>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pogbrEX6vVg>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPyifwkYSPc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPyifwkYSPc>
- b. Scott Yenor, Professor at the Department of Political Science at Boise University, Idaho, has a series of video lectures on YouTube on the novel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmWwRojpFJQ>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcutJvsN2hs>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMGEGtZIAMg>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYUGccoVesc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOwx9UqF59Y>
- c. Test your knowledge of the text with this quiz:
<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/sevengables/quiz.html>
- d. Read the text online:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/77/77-h/77-h.htm>
- e. An interesting site that talks about the original House.
<http://www.hauntedhouses.com/states/ma/seven-gables.htm>

LIST OF VISUALS USED

1. Images of Hawthorne http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathaniel_Hawthorne
2. Picture of the original Turner-Ingersoll house which inspired the setting for the novel.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_the_seven_gables
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salem_witch_trials Painting inspired by the Salem Witch trials.
4. Painting of the pilgrim fathers [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrims_\(Plymouth_Colony\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrims_(Plymouth_Colony))

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