The House of the Seven Gables

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Nathaniel Hawthorne was a descendant of prominent Puritan founders of Salem, Massachusetts—a setting and history he drew on prominently in his writings. As a child, Hawthorne read voraciously and spent several idyllic years in the Maine wilderness. In his youth, he was especially influenced by Gothic romances and the novels of Sir Walter Scott. He attended Bowdoin College, where he befriended Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future president Franklin Pierce. As a young man, Hawthorne worked as a magazine editor and in the Boston Custom House, and he began to publish short fiction around the same time. In 1841, Hawthorne lived for a time among the experimental Utopian community at Brook Farm, not primarily because of its ideals, but because he wanted to save money to marry his fiancée, Sophia Peabody. They married in 1842 and settled in Concord, Massachusetts. The Hawthornes had a happy marriage and had three children: Una, Julian, and Rose. Hawthorne's most prolific period began in 1850, when he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*; after a move to a red farmhouse in Lenox, Massachusetts, he wrote *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. He and his family then lived for a time in a house called The Wayside in Concord, Massachusetts, and they spent several years in England after Hawthorne was appointed to a consulate position by his friend President Pierce. Soon after their return, Hawthorne's health began to fail, and he died in his sleep during a vacation in the White Mountains.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Salem Witch Trials of 1692 loom large over *The House of the Seven Gables*, as they did over Hawthorne's own life. The Trials began after two little girls accused three women (a slave, a beggar, and a poor elderly woman) of supernaturally afflicting them with strange fits. Over the coming months, dozens of people, mostly women, were tried for witchcraft, and around 20 were executed for the crime. Within a few years, many of those involved in the trials and executions publicly expressed regret for their involvement, seeing them as a tragic error. Hawthorne's ancestor, John Hathorne, was the only judge who did not repent of his actions—something Hawthorne seems to have felt as a personal shame. *The House of the Seven Gables* is also an example of the genre of Gothic fiction (also known as Gothic horror). With its emphasis on emotion and the "sublime" (things transcending ordinary experience), Gothic fiction is itself considered to be a subgenre of Romanticism. The Gothic literary movement developed in England in the second half of the 18th century, with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* often considered to be its first novel. It found success over the following century in the works of such writers as Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, and Edgar Allan Poe. The term "Gothic" refers to the medieval style of architecture which frequently characterizes the setting in Gothic works. Such novels also contain elements like shadowy, labyrinthine interiors, ancestral curses, wild weather, sensationalist crimes, and innocent maiden heroines—all of which are present in *The House of the Seven Gables*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The House of the Seven Gables falls under the genre of Gothic literature. The first Gothic novel is considered to be Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which is also set in an ornate, haunted dwelling with a history of evil and corruption. Edgar Allen Poe's *Stories* are the best-known example of American Gothic fiction. Other major examples of the genre include Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Additionally, Hawthorne's body of work was contemporaneous with the American Romanticism movement, which sprang up in reaction to the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution and focused on subject matter like aesthetic beauty, spirituality, and nature. Other notable literary works from this era include Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Besides his famous novels, Hawthorne also wrote many short stories, including "Young Goodman Brown" (1835), "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" (1837), and "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The House of the Seven Gables, A Romance
- **When Written:** 1850–1851
- **Where Written:** Lenox, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1851
- **Literary Period:** Romanticism
- **Genre:** Gothic Novel
- **Setting:** 17th- to 19th-century Massachusetts
- **Climax:** Judge Pyncheon's death
- **Antagonist:** Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey)
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Gables Then and Now. Although Hawthorne claims in his

preface that *The House of the Seven Gables* is not based on any location. However, the Turner House, or Turner-Ingersoll Mansion, in Salem, Massachusetts, was an inspiration for him. The Ingersolls were Hawthorne's cousins, and he was struck by the house's history (though, having been renovated to match popular trends, it only boasted three gables at that time). The mansion is a museum today, and citizenship and ESL classes are also offered there.

Peeved Pyncheons. Hawthorne says he chose the surname "Pyncheon" for his characters simply because it suited the tone of the book. After its publication, he received letters from a number of random Pyncheons (whom Hawthorne dubbed "Pyncheon jackasses") who were offended by the way their family name was portrayed. Hawthorne wrote sarcastically to his publisher, Fields, "After exchanging shots with each [Pyncheon], I shall get you to publish the whole correspondence in a style to match that of my other works, and I anticipate a great run on the volume."

PLOT SUMMARY

The weather-beaten **House** of the Seven Gables, the 200-year-old mansion belonging to the Pyncheon family, stands in a New England town. Two centuries ago, the land on which the House stands belonged to an obscure cottager named Matthew Maule. Colonel Pyncheon, a powerful citizen, wanted that land. Following a drawn-out dispute over the property, Maule is executed for alleged witchcraft. Colonel Pyncheon seems to be especially zealous in pursuit of this sentence. Just before Maule is hanged, however, he utters a curse against Pyncheon: "God will give him blood to drink!"

Soon after Maule's death, Colonel Pyncheon begins building an elaborate mansion on Maule's old property; Maule's son, Thomas, is the architect and head carpenter. After the house is finished, Colonel Pyncheon holds a feast for the whole town. However, he fails to greet his guests personally. When the lieutenant governor, followed by the rest of the guests, barges into the Colonel's study, he finds the Colonel dead, with blood on his collar and beard. Though rumors abound, proof of foul play is never established.

After the Colonel's death, it appears that the Pyncheons are destined to become very rich on the basis of a land grant in the Maine wilderness. However, the vital deed cannot be found. Despite this, subsequent generations carry themselves like potential nobility and tend to become sluggish, expecting to be enriched at any time. Some occasionally doubt the Pyncheons' right to the land on which the House is built. After Uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon researches the history of the property and concludes that it rightly belonged to the Maules, he is soon found dead. After that, the property passes into the hands of the respectable Judge Pyncheon, who lives on a country estate a few miles outside of town. That brings the story to the present generation of Pyncheons, of whom there are only a few left—besides the Judge and his son, there is Clifford (who was imprisoned for Uncle Jaffrey's murder), Clifford's impoverished sister, Hepzibah, and a 17-year-old country cousin, Phoebe. Hepzibah is the current occupant of the House of the Seven Gables. The Maule family has not been heard from for 30 years.

One day, Hepzibah Pyncheon wakes before sunrise. Having lived as a recluse for the past quarter-century, she dreads the coming day's events. In one of the House's front gables, she is opening a cent shop filled with goods like flour, candles, beans, and even gingerbread and toys. She looks both ludicrous and genteel as she puts the finishing touches on her inventory, and she can't help weeping as she unbars the door for the first time. Her first customers include Holgrave, the young **daguerreotypist** who boards in one of the other gables, and schoolboy Ned Higgins, who develops a love for Hepzibah's gingerbread cookies. However, the day is exhausting and humiliating for the formerly aristocratic woman. As she's closing down the shop that evening, her young cousin Phoebe arrives for an unannounced visit.

The next day, though Hepzibah tries to persuade Phoebe that the House is unsuitable for a young girl, Phoebe insists that she can make herself useful, so Hepzibah agrees to let her stay for a while. Phoebe quickly proves herself to be a skilled housekeeper with a knack for business. After a successful day in the shop, Phoebe meets Holgrave in the garden and is puzzled by his forthright manner. That night, she thinks she hears an odd voice and halting footsteps on the stairs.

The next morning, a man named Clifford with long, graying hair appears at the breakfast table—it was his voice and step Phoebe heard the night before. Clifford appears disoriented and bewildered by his surroundings, but there's also a graceful air about him, suggesting that he must have been handsome once. Clifford finds Phoebe delightful, though he is startled by Hepzibah's aged appearance. Eventually, he weeps and falls asleep at the table. Phoebe soon learns that Clifford is Hepzibah's brother. Phoebe also meets Judge Pyncheon in the shop and is alarmed by his rapid transition between harsh and sunny moods; he reminds her uncomfortably of Colonel Pyncheon's portrait. When the Judge pushes past her into the house, Hepzibah bars him from seeing Clifford, who fears him.

In the coming days, it's evident that Phoebe is Clifford's preferred companion. In fact, her cheerful, wholesome presence rejuvenates life in the dusty, mournful House of the Seven Gables. Phoebe and Clifford especially enjoy sitting together in the garden or overlooking the street from a second-floor window. Clifford grows childlike when he watches hummingbirds or blows soap-bubbles, but he cowers whenever he sees Judge Pyncheon at a distance.

In her spare time, Phoebe befriends Holgrave. She likes his self-confidence, yet she's unsettled by his detachment, his lack of

regard for tradition, and his resistance to settling down. Progress is the only thing Holgrave seems to believe in. He believes that the House of the Seven Gables symbolizes all that's antithetical to progress—such as the desire to establish a family, which he believes is the root of every human wrong.

Holgrave reads Phoebe a short story he has written about Alice Pyncheon, a descendant of the Colonel, who lived in the House 37 years after the Colonel's death. In the story, the then-head of the Pyncheons, Gervayse, summons a carpenter named Matthew Maule. This Matthew Maule is the grandson of the Maule who was executed. Rumors swirl around him, and he's said to possess mysterious powers. Gervayse wants to know the whereabouts of the deed to the Pyncheon land in Maine; its disappearance has an alleged connection with the Maules. Maule persuades Gervayse to let him hypnotize Alice; using her as a spiritual medium, he can then contact their respective ancestors in order to learn the deed's location. The ghostly ancestors, however, do not comply. In addition, Alice remains under Maule's hypnotic spell for the rest of her life, forced to obey Maule's wishes from afar. While reading this story, Holgrave inadvertently casts Phoebe into a slightly hypnotic state.

After this, Phoebe takes a trip home to her village, and morale in the House of the Seven Gables declines sharply. One day, Judge Pyncheon appears at the House and insists on seeing Clifford. He suspects that Clifford knows the whereabouts of Uncle Jaffrey's remaining fortune. He warns Hepzibah that if Clifford denies knowledge of this, the Judge will take it as evidence that Clifford should be committed to an asylum. When Hepzibah reluctantly goes in search of Clifford, he is not in his chamber. She soon discovers him in the parlor, laughing wildly at the dead form of the Judge. In terror, she follows a newly lucid, purposeful Clifford out of the House and through the town, where they catch a train to the countryside.

On the train, Clifford feels transformed. He chats with a wary fellow passenger about the transforming effects of train travel on society—it represents a future in which human beings no longer need to confine themselves to sedentary homes. After the other passenger begins to grow suspicious of Clifford's ramblings, Clifford and Hepzibah disembark. Clifford's mood sinks, and Hepzibah regains control of the situation, praying for God's help.

Meanwhile, the morning after the Judge's death, Phoebe returns to a strangely abandoned House of the Seven Gables and is warmly welcomed by Holgrave. Holgrave explains that Hepzibah and Clifford are missing and tells her that he has discovered Judge Pyncheon's body. Though horrified by this discovery and how bad it looks for Clifford, he felt joy when Phoebe appeared. They declare their love for each other. Soon, Hepzibah and Clifford arrive home, to everyone's relief.

In the aftermath of Judge Pyncheon's death, Clifford is vindicated by information gathered by one of Holgrave's hypnotist friends—that Judge Pyncheon was, in fact, indirectly responsible for Uncle Jaffrey's death, but he allowed Clifford to take the fall for murder. Judge Pyncheon's property passes to Hepzibah, Clifford, and Phoebe (and to Holgrave through Phoebe). They decide to leave the House of the Seven Gables and live on Judge Pyncheon's country estate. In a secret recess behind Colonel Pyncheon's portrait, Clifford and Holgrave discover the worthless deed to the old territory in Maine. Holgrave reveals that he is a descendant of the Maule family and that the location of the deed had been passed down to him through his ancestor Thomas, the carpenter, who built the recess and hid the deed there. As the Pyncheons and Holgrave depart for their new home, the ghost of Alice Pyncheon can be heard playing the harpsichord one last time before leaving the House of the Seven Gables for heaven.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hepzibah Pyncheon – Hepzibah is the member of the Pyncheon family who currently resides in the **House** of the Seven Gables, having lived as a near-recluse there for the past quarter-century. Hepzibah grew up thinking of herself as a member of the aristocracy even as the family's fortunes declined. Now an elderly and impoverished woman, she is badly nearsighted and dresses in rustling black silks and a turban. Though her poor vision gives her a perpetually scowling expression, giving her a reputation in her community for being ill-tempered, Hepzibah is actually emotionally sensitive and tender-hearted toward others. She especially devotes her life to caring for her beloved brother, Clifford, after his release from prison. To this end, she opens a cent shop in one of the House's gables, even though she sees this as a great shame and degradation after her genteel upbringing. Hepzibah lets her cousin Phoebe stay with her and soon comes to appreciate the girl's youthful presence and superior domestic and business abilities. Because Hepzibah's aged appearance disturbs Clifford, she also enlists Phoebe in helping to care for him. A perceptive soul, Hepzibah loathes and mistrusts her cousin Judge Pyncheon as few others do; she refuses his monetary assistance and tries to stand up to him when he threatens Clifford. After the Judge's death, Hepzibah briefly flees with Clifford into the countryside. Later, she, Clifford, and Phoebe inherit the Judge's properties, moving out of the House of the Seven Gables and into his country estate.

Phoebe Pyncheon – Phoebe is Hepzibah and Clifford's 17-year-old cousin. She grew up in the country, outside the Pyncheon family orbit, and she takes after her mother with her enterprising, capable ways. Around the same time that Clifford is released from jail, Phoebe comes to visit Hepzibah, wanting to be of use to the Pyncheon household. Phoebe is a pretty, warm, and joyful girl who has a beautifying effect on her

environment and on other people, always knowing how to make a place feel like home. She quickly rejuvenates the **House** of the Seven Gables, increases business in Hepzibah's shop, and cheers the depressed Clifford—she's even more adept at this than his sister Hepzibah. She also befriends Holgrave, although, as a rule-following girl who respects authority, she cannot relate to his cynicism and lack of regard for tradition. As they spend time talking together, however, her affection for Holgrave gradually grows. Despite Phoebe's bright innocence, the House takes a toll on her demeanor, making her feel as if she has aged significantly in a short time. When she briefly returns to the country, the House accordingly loses its spark. After her return, she and Holgrave declare their love for each other and plan to marry, a union of the Pyncheon and Maule families. The couple joins Hepzibah and Clifford in moving to Judge Pyncheon's country estate.

Clifford Pyncheon – Clifford is Hepzibah's brother and one of the last surviving members of the Pyncheon family. However, he does not take after them; in fact, he is tender-hearted, delicate, and a lover of beauty. These characteristics make it especially devastating when Judge Pyncheon lets Clifford take the fall for Uncle Jaffrey's death, leading to Clifford's 30 years of imprisonment. When Clifford is released and returns to the **House** of the Seven Gables, he is a shell of his younger self, bewildered, disoriented, and unable to relate to the world around him. After Hepzibah's age proves to be off-putting to Clifford, Phoebe forms a special bond with him and helps him regain a childlike joy in nature and simple pastimes. After Judge Pyncheon threatens Clifford with commitment to an asylum, citing his childlike and erratic behavior, the Judge soon ends up dead by mysterious means. Clifford gleefully flees the House with Hepzibah, enjoying a triumphant train journey during which he regales a fellow passenger with theories about progress, until he realizes they cannot outrun the Pyncheon curse. However, in the aftermath of the Judge's death, Clifford is somewhat vindicated for Uncle Jaffrey's death and he regains a measure of happiness when he and his relatives move into the countryside.

Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey) – Judge Pyncheon is Hepzibah and Clifford's cousin and a nephew of Uncle Jaffrey. (In fact, his first name is also Jaffrey, but he is generally referred to as "the Judge" so as not to confuse him with his uncle.) The **House** of the Seven Gables and most of Jaffrey's other riches are passed onto the Judge after Jaffrey's death. Following a wild youth, the Judge studied law and entered politics, establishing himself as a respectable citizen with an impeccable reputation. He lives on a country estate a few miles outside of town. Judge Pyncheon has a famously jovial exterior—but inside, he's as cold and hard as his ancestor, Colonel Pyncheon, whom he uncannily resembles. Judge Pyncheon was responsible for Uncle Jaffrey's death, but he lets Clifford take the fall for it and deeply suppresses this fact in his conscience. Hepzibah always suspects the Judge, calling him "the horror of [her] life," refusing his monetary support, and barring him from access to Clifford as best she can. The Judge is obsessed with his status, his political aspirations (his friends are poised to hand him the governorship), and adding to his wealth. After Clifford is released from jail, Judge Pyncheon threatens him with commitment to an asylum if he does not reveal the whereabouts of Jaffrey's remaining wealth. Shortly thereafter, he suddenly and mysteriously dies, and his wealth and property passes to Clifford, Hepzibah, and Phoebe.

Holgrave – Holgrave is a mysterious young man in his early 20s who boards in one of the Pyncheon **house**'s seven gables. He is at once grave in his demeanor and vigorous in pursuit of his many interests. He has held a variety of jobs, such as dentist, editor, and hypnotist; he currently works as a **daguerreotypist**. Holgrave has a staunch belief in societal progress and the tearing down of deadening traditions, such as those represented by the House of the Seven Gables, which he professes to hate. Phoebe finds Holgrave's radicalism off-putting, but she respects his self-assurance and gradually grows to befriend and love him. Though it is not revealed until the end of the novel, Holgrave is a descendant of Matthew Maule and knows the secrets of the House of the Seven Gables, including the location of the long-lost deed. He represents rationalism in the story, and he claims to give no credence to supernatural occurrences in the House, though he incorporates some into the short story he writes about Alice Pyncheon. Holgrave and Phoebe become engaged after Judge Pyncheon's death, and their marriage represents a union of the Maule and Pyncheon families and, implicitly, a breaking of the family curse.

Colonel Pyncheon – Colonel Pyncheon is the Puritan ancestor of the present-day Pyncheons. He is a prominent, iron-willed man. Colonel Pyncheon desires Matthew Maule's property and builds his mansion, the **House** of the Seven Gables, on it after Maule is executed for witchcraft. Colonel Pyncheon is then found dead during his housewarming party, supposedly cursed by Maule. Colonel Pyncheon looms large over his posterity—both literally in his uncannily lifelike **portrait** and in the grasping desire for more and more wealth which he passes down to his descendants.

Matthew Maule – Matthew Maule is an obscure cottager in 1600s Massachusetts, whose small plot of land Colonel Pyncheon covets. Maule is a stubborn, prideful man, and the dispute over the property goes unresolved until Maule ends up being tried and executed for alleged witchcraft. Colonel Pyncheon is believed to have taken an enthusiastic role in the sentencing. From the scaffold before his death, Maule declares a curse on Colonel Pyncheon and his posterity: "God will give [them] blood to drink!" Colonel Pyncheon mysteriously dies soon after this, and his descendants seem to bear the effects of the curse as well.

Uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon – Jaffrey is Clifford and Hepzibah's

eccentric, melancholy uncle. He has an interest in the Pyncheon family history, and his research leads him to determine that Matthew Maule's property was wrongfully taken and that perhaps the **House** of the Seven Gables (which is built on the land that Colonel Pyncheon took from Maule) should be given up for this reason. Soon after this, Jaffrey is found dead, and Clifford takes the blame for it, leading to decades of imprisonment. Later, it comes out that Jaffrey's other nephew, Judge Pyncheon, was the one truly connected to his death.

Uncle Venner – Uncle Venner is Hepzibah's neighbor, a fixture on Pyncheon Street. He's an old, wrinkled, nearly toothless man, and he does odd jobs in the neighborhood to support himself, also collecting scraps for his pet pig. He has a poetic sort of wisdom that belies his simple, ragged exterior. Hepzibah, Clifford, and Phoebe invite Uncle Venner to join them on their country estate at the end of the novel.

Alice Pyncheon – Alice is a daughter of Gervayse Pyncheon and a descendant of the Colonel. She spends part of her girlhood in Europe and loves to play the harpsichord. Matthew Maule (the carpenter) hypnotizes Alice when Gervayse is seeking the old Pyncheon deed, and Alice remains disgraced and under Matthew's power for the rest of her life. Alice's ghost is said to haunt the **House** of the Seven Gables, playing the harpsichord. After the family curse is broken, she is said to escape to heaven.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Gervayse Pyncheon – Gervayse Pyncheon is Colonel Pyncheon's grandson and Alice's father. According to Holgrave's short story, Gervayse allows Matthew Maule (the carpenter) to hypnotize Alice in a quest to locate the family deed in hopes of increasing his wealth.

Matthew Maule (the carpenter) – This Matthew Maule is the grandson of the executed "wizard" Matthew Maule and is the son of Thomas Maule. He is bitter and prideful. When Gervayse Pyncheon asks for his help in locating the family deed, Matthew vengefully hypnotizes and controls Alice Pyncheon, leading to her death.

Thomas Maule – Thomas is the son of Matthew Maule. He is the architect and head carpenter for the **House** of the Seven Gables. At the end of the book, it's revealed that Thomas hid the Pyncheon deed in a secret recess behind Colonel Pyncheon's **portrait**.

Ned Higgins – Ned Higgins is a red-cheeked, frizzy-haired schoolboy who is among Hepzibah's first and most frequent customers in her shop. Ned buys Hepzibah's gingerbread cookies every chance he gets.

The Rev. Mr. Higginson – Rev. Higginson prays at Colonel Pyncheon's housewarming festival and gives a gushing sermon at Colonel Pyncheon's funeral.

Dixey – Dixey is a laborer who appears several times in the novel, gossiping and speculating with a friend about the Pyncheon family.

Scipio – Scipio is Gervayse Pyncheon's slave.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

WRONGDOING, GUILT, AND RETRIBUTION

In his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, author Nathaniel Hawthorne states his book's primary "moral": "the truth, namely, that the wrongdoing of one generation lives into the successive ones [...] [becoming] uncontrollable mischief." In other words, one generation's misdeed affects subsequent generations in ways that the original perpetrator can neither predict nor control once events are set in motion. The guilt of the perpetrator's act, then, lands on subsequent generations in ways that they can't escape, whether they clearly deserve it or not. This idea plays out in the novel's portrayal of the Pyncheon family's intergenerational troubles, which begin when their Puritan ancestor Colonel Pyncheon covets land belonging to Matthew Maule, a poor but stubborn man who's built a humble dwelling on the lot. This issue drags on for years, until Maule's death, when he is executed for witchcraft—a sentence which Pyncheon is said to have zealously supported—and later generations of the Pyncheon family suffer for the Colonel's greed and alleged bloodlust. By tracing the misfortunes of both guilty and innocent members of the Pyncheons over several generations, Hawthorne argues that wrongdoing has an unpredictable ripple effect which lands indiscriminately on both the guilty and the innocent.

At first, Colonel Pyncheon's greed seems primarily to cause his own downfall. Even before describing the events that befall the first generation of Massachusetts Pyncheons, the narrator summarizes their fate: "the act of the passing generation is the germ which may and must produce good or evil fruit in a far-distant time; [...] [it] inevitably [sows] the acorns of a more enduring growth, which may darkly overshadow [...] posterity." In other words, one generation's actions have further-reaching effects than it might seem at the time, inescapably shaping future generations' lives. Colonel Pyncheon's wrongdoing meets with relatively straightforward retribution: "At the moment of execution," the narrator explains, "Maule had addressed [Pyncheon] from the scaffold, and uttered a

prophecy [...] 'God will give him blood to drink!'" Later, during Puncheon's housewarming party, he is discovered dead in his chair. "[T]here was blood on his ruff [...] his hoary beard was saturated with it. [...] Dead, in his new house!" Maule's prophesy, then, is already coming true: the perpetrator dies in the **house** he built on Maule's land. The effects of the misdeed and curse are contained within a relatively predictable pattern, as it's typically assumed that a person who commits a malevolent act will be the one directly punished for it.

However, as the Puncheon line begins to die out and various deaths occur (like that of Uncle Jaffrey, who dies mysteriously), the effects become less neatly predictable. Even those who are not clearly guilty suffer, suggesting that the original wrongdoing is continually renewed in each generation, as surely as the House of the Seven Gables is inherited. For example, centuries later, Uncle Jaffrey Puncheon researches the history of the House of the Seven Gables and develops pangs of guilt: "Being of an eccentric and melancholy turn of mind, and greatly given to rummaging old records and hearkening to old traditions," he concludes that Maule had indeed been defrauded, and that the Puncheons are in the wrong. But before Uncle Jaffrey can act on this conclusion, he mysteriously dies. Some 30 years later, young Phoebe Puncheon sees her distant cousin Judge Puncheon in person. She observes his similarity to the **portrait** of old Colonel Pynchon, almost like "a kind of prophecy," and she wonders if "the weaknesses and defects, [...] 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 some mysterious way, it seems that character defects may be inherited, rather like property or even curses. In fact, Phoebe's interpretation of the Puncheons' plight seems sounder than the explanation of the rumored curse alone—jealousy and greed account for more than a supernatural curse can. This turns out to be true, as Judge Puncheon, enraged by Jaffrey's search for the truth and the threat this poses to his wealth, turns out to have been responsible for Jaffrey's death.

Not only did Jaffrey Puncheon die, but his nephew Clifford was jailed in the Judge's stead for decades after Jaffrey's death, showing how their ancestor the Colonel's wrongdoing wreaks havoc even upon the innocent. Clifford is never formally vindicated regarding the murder he didn't commit. "It is a truth," the narrator concludes, "that no great mistake, whether acted or endured, in our mortal sphere, is ever really set right. [...] If, after long lapse of years, the right seems to be in our power, we find no niche to set it in. The better remedy is for the sufferer to pass on, and leave what he once thought his irreparable ruin far behind him." This implies that the wrongs set in motion by Colonel Puncheon will continue to affect his posterity—even those like Clifford who are truly innocent—and that there may be no way to set things completely right until the family is no more. This ominous "truth" accords with Hawthorne's argument that ancestral wrongdoing can have unpredictable, indiscriminate effects on the guilty and innocent alike.

WEALTH, POWER, AND STATUS

In the author's preface, Hawthorne includes "the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim and crush them" in the book's "moral." Throughout the novel, though, it isn't so much the presence of riches acquired through immoral meals, but the aspiration for wealth (or the desire for more) that crushes later generations. In the Puncheon family, early wealth engenders power through status and reputation, which in turn has deteriorating effects on their own morals, their consciences, and the wellbeing of those around them. Through Hawthorne's portrayal of the fluctuating fortunes of the Puncheon family, he argues that power doesn't just corrupt those who hold it, but those who desire it, while always doing the most harm to those who *don't* have it.

Those with power and influence can do great harm, and that harm tends to fall most heavily on those who lack power. Hawthorne refers to the 17th-century witchcraft hysteria as one manifestation of power used wrongly: "Old Matthew Maule, in a word, was executed for the crime of witchcraft. He was one of the martyrs to that terrible delusion, which should teach us, among its other morals, that the influential classes [...] are fully liable to all the passionate error that has ever characterized the maddest mob." Those in power, in other words, are not exempt from deadly delusions, and in fact are capable of doing more harm through such delusions than a "mob" because of the power they hold. The descendants of Matthew Maule do not seem to hold a grudge about their ancestor's dispossession, but even if they did, they lack the power to do anything about it. There "is something so massive, stable, and almost irresistibly imposing in the exterior presentment of established rank [...] that few poor and humble men have moral force enough to question it, even in their secret minds." One of the corrupting effects of power, in other words, is that it prevents those who've been victimized by it from recognizing the wrong, much less speaking up on their own behalf.

Even in the relative absence of power, the desire for power and influence can have a stagnating effect on those who aspire to it. A useless property claim in the Maine wilderness makes generations of Puncheons believe that they stand to inherit great wealth, "an absurd delusion of family importance, which all along characterized the Puncheons. It caused the poorest member of the race to feel as if he inherited a kind of nobility, and might yet come into the possession of princely wealth to support it." In other words, the desire for money and property can have a stagnating effect on a person's character, though it

arguably has less of an effect than on those who already possess wealth. For some Pyncheons, the effect of this belief "was to increase the liability to sluggishness and dependence [...] while awaiting the realization of [their] dreams." The Pyncheons study the outdated map of their supposed inheritance and "[calculate] the progressively increasing value of the territory, as if there were yet a prospect of its ultimately forming a princedom for themselves." Instead of working to provide for themselves and contribute to society now, in other words, the family puts their hopes in presumptive future wealth, making themselves useless in the present. Even Hepzibah Pyncheon, though she takes the initiative to open a cent-shop out of fear of penury, spends most of her life fixed upon "deeply cherished and ridiculous consciousness of long descent [...] and, in the way of accomplishment, her recollections, [...] of having formerly thrummed on a harpsichord, and walked a minuet, and worked an antique tapestry stitch on her sampler." Her own usefulness is compromised because of an unsubstantiated and ultimately meaningless feeling of entitlement to a wealth that never materializes.

Ultimately, though, the worst effect of power is that it even corrupts those who hold it by deceiving them about their own moral state, curtailing the possibility of moral improvement. In Judge Pyncheon's case, "The church acknowledged [his good character]; the state acknowledged it. [...] In all the very extensive sphere of those who knew him, whether in his public or private capacities," there was scarcely a person "who would have dreamed of seriously disputing his claim to a high and honorable place in the world's regard. [...] [H]is conscience bore an accordant testimony with the world's laudatory voice." The praise of church, state, and community can have a silencing effect on a powerful person's conscience, entrenching him in corruption and perpetuating the cycle of harm. In this way, as well as in quelling individual initiative and oppressing those of lower status, power and status—even just *perceived* power and status—wield a complex and corrupting influence.

APPEARANCES VS. REALITY

The House of the Seven Gables is characterized by an interplay between what appears to be true versus what's actually true. For example, Clifford, rumored to be hardened criminal, is actually a tender-hearted man who's sensitive to beauty. Similarly, Hepzibah's customary scowl (due to nearsightedness) gives a misleading view of her personality: "her heart never frowned." Though inward goodness sometimes manifests outwardly—as in the example of Phoebe—more often, outward, public appearances mask inward defects of character. By contrasting Phoebe's transparently good character with the more deceptive appearances of figures like Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne argues that society tends to reinforce outward, public appearances while overlooking and suppressing inward realities.

Outward beauty is sometimes reflective of inner beauty. For instance, in addition to being physically beautiful, Phoebe Pyncheon has the gift of bringing out the best in the things and people around her: "Little Phoebe was one of those persons who possess [...] a kind of natural magic that enables these favored ones to bring out the hidden capabilities of things around them; and particularly to give a look of comfort and habitableness to any place which, for however brief a period, may happen to be their home." Phoebe lights up the **House** of the Seven Gables with her "magic"—she's able to make it a comfortable home because of her ability to see the inner potential of the worn façade and its drearier inhabitants. While Phoebe is oriented toward practical, outward things, in other words, this practicality stems from her spirit: "There was a spiritual quality in Phoebe's activity. [Her work] might so easily have taken a squalid and ugly aspect," but it was rendered "lovely, by the spontaneous grace with which these homely duties seemed to bloom out of her character." In other words, Phoebe's practical bent originates in her interior loveliness, which in turn sheds new light and importance on the potentially "squalid" tasks of helping to run the house.

However, outward appearances can also be deceiving and indicative of spiritual decay and immorality. Formal status and public approval, for example, often mask more unsavory, privately-circulated truths. "It is often instructive to take the woman's, the private and domestic, view of a public man; nor can anything be more curious than the vast discrepancy" between public and private. For example, "tradition affirmed that [Colonel Pyncheon] had been greedy of wealth; [Judge Pyncheon], too, with all the show of liberal expenditure, was said to be as close-fisted as if his grip were of iron." The public reputations of both Colonel and Judge Pyncheon, in other words, are more reflective of false outward appearances than the realities of their characters. Hawthorne suggests that those who have a lesser role in shaping public opinion are perhaps more attentive to these inner realities. Because of eminent men's preoccupation with the external, reinforced by society's approval, such men are liable to self-deception: "They are ordinarily men to whom forms are of paramount importance. Their field of action lies among the external phenomena of life." Their public success "builds up, as it were, a tall and stately edifice, which, in the view of other people, and ultimately in his own view, is no other than the man's character, or the man himself." People like Judge Pyncheon become so focused on maintaining the public "edifice" that they lose track of their own inner character, in contrast to Phoebe, whose inner beauty pervades everything around her.

Hawthorne suggests that those who are motivated by inner goodness have an especially hard time coming to terms with the discrepancy between appearance and reality—like Phoebe, who "perplexed herself [...] with queries as to [...] whether

judges, clergymen, and other characters of that eminent stamp and respectability could really […] be otherwise than just and upright men." Someone like Phoebe can serve, ironically, to reinforce false façades by her innocent assumption that the "respectable" are worthy of their reputation. If there's any hope of resisting the false front maintained by figures like Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne suggests that the less conspicuous goodness of people like Phoebe—and the private insights of those outside the public square—deserve more attention than public figures whose characters don't hold up to scrutiny.

HORROR AND INNOCENCE

In the author's preface, Hawthorne observes that he will "mingle the Marvelous" as an element of the story, allowing some of the "legendary mist" of the past to hover over the action for "picturesque effect." *The House of the Seven Gables* is an example of the Gothic genre, which is characterized by sensational hints of crime or madness, the presence of picturesque, brooding architecture, and an overall lingering gloom and melancholy. Hawthorne blends such elements into his account of the Pyncheon family's troubled history, typically leaving room for doubt as to whether the more fantastical elements have really happened or are simply figments of characters' imaginations. He also contrasts the darkness of the **House** of the Seven Gables and its inhabitants with the bright innocence of Phoebe, a distant relative raised elsewhere. By blending ambiguity into supernatural occurrences and contrasting dark and light, Hawthorne suggests that horror is an aspect of real life, not simply a fantasy—and that while innocence can combat horror's effects, its success is never guaranteed.

Hawthorne maintains an ambiguity as to whether the story's supernatural elements are real. For example, one day Phoebe hears a mysterious voice: "[S]he seemed to hear the murmur of an unknown voice. It was strangely indistinct, however, and less like articulate words than an unshaped sound […] So vague was it, that its impression or echo in Phoebe's mind was that of unreality." In the night, she hears the voice again, and in the morning she learns that cousin Clifford, recently released from prison, has come home. The voice's vague "utterance of feeling" must have been his—or else, somehow, the House's remembrance of the dark circumstances surrounding his departure. Details like this are never made clear, allowing the reader to draw their own conclusion. The blurring of what's real and what's not is further complicated when Holgrave, a boarder at the House and an observer of its mysteries, writes a short story about Alice Pyncheon, a long-ago relative. The story creates a deliberate distance from reality. After Alice is vengefully hypnotized by a descendant of Matthew Maule, she is described as being "Maule's slave […] Maule had but to wave his hand; and, wherever the proud lady chanced to be […] her spirit passed from beneath her own control, and bowed itself to Maule," laughing, crying, or dancing at inappropriate moments and ultimately driving Alice to her death. The story-within-a-story allows room for doubt: did Alice's death truly come about this way, or is Holgrave taking liberty with the details? Either way, his portrayal of events casts a deeper shadow over the Pyncheon family. Further, following the abrupt and unexplained death of Judge Pyncheon, the narrator lingers over a description of various Pyncheon family ghosts surrounding the corpse at midnight. He then concludes, "The fantastic scene just hinted at must by no means be considered as forming an actual portion of our story. We were betrayed into this brief extravagance by the quiver of the moonbeams […] reflected in the looking glass, which, you are aware, is always a kind of window or doorway into the spirit world." Hawthorne toys with the reader by claiming that the ghosts aren't *really* part of the story and that they can be rationally explained away. Yet without hints about ghostly voices, hypnotism, and spectral ancestors, the moral darkness within the story would lose much of its power.

In contrast to this atmosphere of horror and the supernatural, Phoebe is portrayed as the very antithesis of horror. Phoebe is presented as solidly real, like when she helps anchor the long-imprisoned Clifford in tangible reality: "Now, Phoebe's presence made a home about her […] She was real! Holding her hand, you felt something; a tender something; a substance, and a warm one—and so long as you should feel its grasp […] you might be certain that your place was good in the whole sympathetic chain of human nature. The world was no longer a delusion." Clifford has been disconnected from humanity for decades, and Phoebe's substantial warmth assures him that he's once again part of it—here, there's none of the vagueness and mystery that's associated with the House's horrors. When Phoebe leaves, the House is cast into gloom both inside and out: "Phoebe was not there; nor did the sunshine fall upon the floor. The garden, with its muddy walks, and the chill, dripping foliage […] was an image to be shuddered at. Nothing flourished [.]" In fact, it's only in Phoebe's absence that Judge Pyncheon gains entrance, threatens Clifford, and then suffers his untimely death. It's as if Phoebe's warm, bright presence anchors the House of the Seven Gables in reality and keeps actual horror at bay, however briefly.

When Phoebe and Holgrave (a descendant of Matthew Maule, the one who originally cursed the House) become a couple, their union offers a kind of resolution to the horror that's haunted the Pyncheons for so long: "The bliss which makes all things true, beautiful, and holy shone around this youth and maiden. […] They transfigured the earth, and made it Eden again, and themselves the two first dwellers in it. The dead man [Judge Pyncheon], so close beside them, was forgotten." Phoebe and Holgrave, in other words, transform the House, implicitly reversing its curse through the innocence of their union. Yet there remains something unsettling about this

proximity of horror and innocence, and Hawthorne, characteristically, leaves their future happiness ambiguous, letting the reader wonder whether the old curse has, in fact, survived in some form.

TIME, CHANGE, AND PROGRESS

The titular **House** of the Seven Gables seems to be stuck in the 17th century in which it was built. It is haunted by a centuries-old feud which seems to consign the very building—as well as is residents—to inescapable decay. A youthful newcomer like Phoebe can temporarily arrest this aging process, but the House takes its toll on her as well. This view of human aging is reflected in the novel's perspective on societal progress, too. The old who have suffered can become more prophetically forward-looking than the young who haven't experienced as much of the outside world, as seen particularly in Clifford Pyncheon's ecstatic speech about the spiral of time and progress at the end of the book. By portraying the passage of time in these nonlinear ways, Hawthorne challenges the idea that age and change proceed in a straightforward, predictable fashion.

Aging isn't strictly linear in the House of the Seven Gables: while the youthful age prematurely, the old become childlike again. Phoebe's youthful presence transforms the decaying atmosphere: "The grime and sordidness [...] seemed to have vanished since her appearance there; the gnawing tooth of the dry rot was stayed [...] the dust had ceased to settle down so densely" since she arrived. Phoebe's youth and industriousness actually seem to halt the House's aging process, making it more habitable for its longtime residents. Her presence touches their aged minds and hearts, too. Phoebe's effect is especially pronounced on cousin Clifford. Under Phoebe's influence and that of time spent in the garden, "It was with indescribable interest, and even more than childish delight, that Clifford watched the hummingbirds. [...] He had not merely grown young—he was a child again." After three decades in prison, the depressed and mentally stagnant Clifford finds renewed interest and delight in nature and in human company, seemingly aging backward thanks to Phoebe's nurturing presence. But the effects of aging aren't unidirectional. Phoebe tells Holgrave, "I shall never be so merry as before I knew Cousin Hepzibah and poor Cousin Clifford. I have grown a great deal older [...] not exactly sadder, but, certainly, with not half so much lightness in my spirit! I have given them my sunshine [...] but, of course, I cannot both give and keep it." After only a few weeks in the House of the Seven Gables, Phoebe's spirit has prematurely aged from the effort of giving away her happiness; the atmosphere in the House cannot restore what she must give its inhabitants. Youth and age, in other words, aren't fixed qualities in this atmosphere.

Progress isn't linear, either. In fact, perceptions of "progress" can become more radical, not less, with age, depending on one's experiences of life. Holgrave, Hepzibah's young boarder, at first seems to be the novel's primary example of a forward-looking attitude, in contrast to his elders: " [Holgrave] was a young man still, and therefore looked upon the world [...] as a tender stripling, capable of being improved into all that it ought to be [...] He had that sense, or inward prophecy [...] that we are not doomed to creep on forever in the old bad way," but that a "golden era" is dawning. It makes sense that a young man would see the world, too, as young, malleable, and capable of improvement. Yet Holgrave isn't alone in his attitude. Clifford, liberated by the death of the tormenting Judge Pyncheon, assumes a youthful attitude while fleeing into the countryside on the train. He tells a fellow passenger, "You are aware, my dear sir [...] that all human progress is in a circle; or, to use a more accurate and beautiful figure, in an ascending spiral curve. While we fancy ourselves going straight forward, and attaining, at every step, an entirely new position of affairs, we do actually return to something long ago tried and abandoned, but which we now find etherealized, refined, and perfected to its ideal." In other words, Clifford doesn't just adopt a progressive view of things—he sees even further than Holgrave does, perceiving a future in which "progress" constitutes the transformation and "spiritualization" of the old, rather than its abandonment. For example, Clifford sees railroad travel—quite a novelty in the mid-19th century—as a transformation of older modes of travel, and of habitation itself: "These railroads [...] spiritualize travel! Transition being so facile, what can be any man's inducement to tarry in one spot? [...] Why should he make himself a prisoner [...] when he may just as easily dwell, in one sense, nowhere[?]" Clifford sees this technological advancement as a revolution in the very idea of dwelling somewhere. Of course, this could be read as his liberation from prison and from the House of the Seven Gables taken to a giddy extreme; but it also suggests that one's view of progress isn't simply a function of one's age, but of what one has suffered and endured in life.

Where Holgrave's youthful, untried view of progress is vague and imprecise—a product of how relatively little he's experienced—Clifford's is really the more radical, as he puts it into concrete practice, using new technology to flee the ties that have tormented him. On the train, Clifford exults that the further he gets from the House of the Seven Gables, the more his youth returns to him: "[D]o I look old? If so, my aspect belies me strangely; for [...] I feel in the very heyday of my youth, with the world and my best days before me!" In a certain way, then, Clifford ends up being the youngest character in the book, and the clearest example of how one's environment shapes one's development and one's view of the surrounding world. Clifford's liberating experience sums up Hawthorne's argument that neither one's perceived age nor one's view of progress unfolds in the direction one might expect.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HOUSE

The titular House of the Seven Gables symbolizes the rise and fall of the Pyncheon family. Built on land wrested from a poor cottager, who then curses Colonel Pyncheon, the House stands for the greed for greater wealth that characterizes generations of Pyncheons and contributes to much strife, struggle, and death within the family. More broadly, houses in general (especially in the opinions of characters like Holgrave and eventually Clifford) stand for the selfish desire to establish dynasties, which can do harm to the founders' posterity and to society in general.

PORTRAIT AND DAGUERREOTYPE

Throughout the novel, portraits and daguerreotypes (a primitive form of photography) symbolize the essence of individual's characters—especially characters, like Judge Pyncheon, whose public personas are a false front. The hardness evident in the Judge's daguerreotype indicates that, despite his smiling exterior, he's actually a cold-hearted person, resembling the portrait of his ancestor Colonel Pyncheon. By extension, Holgrave's role as a daguerreotypist suggests that he sees through things to their internal reality. Additionally, Colonel Pyncheon's portrait has been concealing the family's long-sought land deed for 200 years—a literal example of a portrait containing the truth (in this case, the truth of the Pyncheons' empty aspirations).

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Thrift Editions edition of *The House of the Seven Gables* published in 1999.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ At the moment of execution—with the halter about his neck, and while Colonel Pyncheon sat on horseback, grimly gazing at the scene—Maule had addressed him from the scaffold, and uttered a prophecy, of which history, as well as fireside tradition, has preserved the very words. "God," said the dying man, pointing his finger, with a ghastly look, at the undismayed countenance of his enemy, "God will give him blood to drink!"

Related Characters: Matthew Maule (speaker), Colonel Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the foundational myth of the Pyncheon family in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Matthew Maule, a commoner accused of witchcraft, is being executed—a sentence which the wealthy Colonel Pyncheon eagerly supports. His enthusiasm is said to have stemmed from his desire to own Maule's desirable patch of land, which he accordingly builds the House of the Seven Gables on following Maule's death. However, Maule's "curse," as uttered here, is believed to have haunted the Pyncheons down the centuries in the form of general family strife and misfortune, as well as a hereditary disease that prematurely kills several prominent Pyncheon men, including the Colonel himself. This quote thereby establishes two of the novel's major themes: first, that the guilt of wrongdoing reverberates in the lives of subsequent generations, often in ways that cannot be foreseen; and, second, that the wealthy and powerful are often able to exert power over the lives of those who have little.

❝ This impalpable claim, therefore, resulted in nothing more solid than to cherish, from generation to generation, an absurd delusion of family importance, which all along characterized the Pyncheons. It caused the poorest member of the race to feel as if he inherited a kind of nobility, and might yet come into the possession of princely wealth to support it. [...] In the baser sort, its effect was to increase the liability to sluggishness and dependence, and induce the victim of a shadowy hope to remit all self-effort, while awaiting the realization of his dreams.

Related Characters: Hepzibah Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

This quote summarizes the affairs of later generations of the Pyncheon family—particularly as they are governed by

an insubstantial claim to a large portion of land in the Maine wilderness. The documentation for this claim is lost, so the Pyncheons never actually take possession of the territory, much less accrue wealth from it. But that doesn't stop the mere rumor of future wealth from shaping the lives of many Pyncheons. The *possibility* of becoming rich makes some Pyncheons assume greater self-importance within their communities than is warranted. It also suppresses personal initiative, as they constantly look to the future in expectation of easy wealth instead of working to provide for themselves and contribute to their communities. A good example is Hepzibah Pyncheon, who opens a cent shop in her old age, only after she has reached the point of poverty. This quote demonstrates Hawthorne's claim that wealth—even the *aspiration* to wealth—can cause people's lives to stagnate and can have a dulling effect on character.

❝ To all appearance, they were a quiet, honest, well-meaning race of people, cherishing no malice against individuals or the public for the wrong which had been done them; or if, at their own fireside, they transmitted, from father to child, any hostile recollection of the wizard's fate and their lost patrimony, it was never acted upon, nor openly expressed. Nor would it have been singular had they ceased to remember that the House of the Seven Gables was resting its heavy framework on a foundation that was rightfully their own. There is something so massive, stable, and almost irresistibly imposing in the exterior presentment of established rank and great possessions that their very existence seems to give them a right to exist; at least, so excellent a counterfeit of right, that few poor and humble men have moral force enough to question it, even in their secret minds.

Related Characters: Matthew Maule

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

After Matthew Maule's death, the Maule family largely lapses into obscurity. Their fate contrasts with the Pyncheon family's in this respect—whereas the Pyncheons enjoy ongoing prominence and leisure, the Maules are socially insignificant and must work hard for daily survival. With this quote, Hawthorne suggests that, in a certain way, the families' respective fates accord with what seems natural in society. Like the House of the Seven Gables looming over the community, the Pyncheon family's prominence and reputation have endured for so long that it's easy to imagine they have always been there and should rightfully remain. Even the Maules, who have a right to question the Pyncheons' position (resting, as it does, on their ancestral property), are lulled into believing that the status quo is just. The Pyncheons' status, however—and the House which symbolizes it—have only a "counterfeit of right" to exist, and as the story develops, it becomes clear that the Maules have longer memories of their dispossession than the Pyncheons have assumed. Hawthorne suggests that such is the case with many whose rank has persisted for a long time, becoming an assumed feature of the landscape that few dare to question.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Here is one of the truest points of melancholy interest that occur in ordinary life. It was the final throe of what called itself old gentility. A lady—who had fed herself from childhood with the shadowy food of aristocratic reminiscences, and whose religion it was that a lady's hand soils itself irremediably by doing aught for bread—this born lady, after sixty years of narrowing means, is fain to step down from her pedestal of imaginary rank. Poverty, treading closely at her heels for a lifetime, had come up with her at last. She must earn her own food, or starve! And we have stolen upon Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon, too irreverently, at the instant of time when the patrician lady is to be transformed into the plebeian woman.

Related Characters: Clifford Pyncheon, Hepzibah Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Hepzibah Pyncheon's "descent" into shopkeeping, a desperate measure in order to keep herself and her brother, Clifford, from starving. For Hepzibah, this step goes against a lifetime of assumptions—chiefly, that a gentlewoman sullies herself by working for her upkeep. Only when she's on the threshold of poverty does she face the so-called humiliation of running a shop in one of the gables in the family mansion. Hepzibah's situation is one of the book's primary examples of the deadening effects that, in Hawthorne's opinion, inherited wealth and reputation can have. The description of Hepzibah's shamefaced shop-opening suggests that she has largely wasted her potential throughout life and might have achieved better things had

she shown initiative earlier (and spared herself poverty as well). Though Hawthorne describes Hepzibah's sorry "transformation" in a tongue-in-cheek manner, he does so without bitterness, suggesting genuine sympathy for the reclusive lady's belated efforts to provide for her household.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Little Phoebe was one of those persons who possess, as their exclusive patrimony, the gift of practical arrangement. It is a kind of natural magic that enables these favored ones to bring out the hidden capabilities of things around them; and particularly to give a look of comfort and habitableness to any place which, for however brief a period, may happen to be their home.

Related Characters: Clifford Pyncheon, Hepzibah Pyncheon, Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Phoebe, a distant Pyncheon cousin who arrives unannounced for a visit with Hepzibah. Because Phoebe grew up at a distance from the House of the Seven Gables, she is untouched by the House's gloom. Her cheerful innocence and outsider status therefore allow another perspective on the inhabitants of the melancholy House. Phoebe's character actually has a transformative effect on the things and people around her—especially her ability to see the potential in her surroundings and her ability to make a home no matter where she is, even someplace as dreary as the Pyncheon house. She does this by things as simple as picking flowers from the garden to beautify the house, and as difficult as befriending the depressed, inscrutable Clifford, bringing sunshine into his life. (It's worth noting that the name Phoebe means "bright" or "radiant.") However, the House also has an effect on Phoebe as the story goes on—even her light is somewhat dampened by the oppressive atmosphere. Still, Phoebe is an example of someone in the story who actually *is* what she appears, unlike many other characters whose exterior belies their interior.

❝ Instead of discussing her claim to rank among ladies, it would be preferable to regard Phoebe as the example of feminine grace and availability combined, in a state of society, if there were any such, where ladies did not exist. There it should be woman's office to move in the midst of practical affairs, and to gild them all, the very homeliest—were it even the scouring of pots and kettles—with an atmosphere of loveliness and joy. Such was the sphere of Phoebe.

To find the born and educated lady, on the other hand, we need look no farther than Hepzibah, our forlorn old maid, in her rustling and rusty silks, with her deeply cherished and ridiculous consciousness of long descent, her shadowy claims to princely territory, and, in the way of accomplishment, her recollections, it may be, of having formerly thrummed on a harpsichord, and walked a minuet, and worked an antique tapestry stitch on her sampler.

Related Characters: Hepzibah Pyncheon, Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

This quote compares the characters of Phoebe and Hepzibah. Young Phoebe is not really a "lady" in a sense that her elderly cousin, Hepzibah, recognizes. In fact, she comes from a world in which the idea of the genteel "lady" doesn't really exist; instead, she has been raised to be personally involved with the practical—even working with her hands, buying and selling, and tending to all the little details of the household. She does all such things with a joyful attitude and an attention to beauty. By contrast, Hepzibah comes from another era. She grew up believing that she is entitled to a certain station in life by virtue of her family's history and pretensions to wealth. Where Phoebe is eminently useful, Hepzibah can only boast relatively "useless" accomplishments befitting her social station, like music, dance, and decorative stitching. Though Hawthorne portrays both women with sympathy, his characterization of Hepzibah as "ridiculous," even pathetic—as well as the contrast between the women's ages—suggests that, in his opinion, the more middle-class, practical woman will occupy a greater role in American society going forward than the aristocratic woman.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"I can assure you that this is a modern face, and one which you will very probably meet. Now, the remarkable point is, that the original wears, to the world's eye—and, for aught I know, to his most intimate friends—an exceedingly pleasant countenance, indicative of benevolence, openness of heart, sunny good humor, and other praiseworthy qualities of that cast. The sun, as you see, tells quite another story, and will not be coaxed out of it, after half a dozen patient attempts on my part. Here we have the man, sly, subtle, hard, imperious, and, withal, cold as ice. [...] And yet, if you could only see the benign smile of the original! It is so much the more unfortunate, as he is a public character of some eminence, and the likeness was intended to be engraved."

Related Characters: Holgrave (speaker), Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Colonel Pyncheon, Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Hepzibah's boarder, Holgrave, works as a daguerreotypist (an early form of photography). When he first meets Phoebe, he shows her a daguerreotype he's captured of Judge Pyncheon, the eminent head of the Pyncheon family. When Phoebe initially looks at the daguerreotype, she thinks it is actually an image of the famous Pyncheon forebear, Colonel Pyncheon. Holgrave explains that she's mistaken—but the striking resemblance between the 17th-century Colonel and the modern Judge is no accident. Although Judge Pyncheon projects a benevolent, sunny, good-humored personality, the daguerreotype captures the truth of his character—that, like his Colonel ancestor, he is hard, cruel, and "cold as ice." This is an example of the symbolic role of portraits and photographs in the novel—for Hawthorne, these art forms capture the truth of people's personalities in uncanny ways, undercutting publicly-projected personas. This symbol connects, in turn, to the theme of appearances versus reality which runs through the novel: the way characters wish to be seen in public isn't always reflective of their true character. This is also reflected in the fact that Judge Pyncheon intended to have the daguerreotype likeness engraved, but he apparently rejected it when he saw how cruel he appeared.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Then, all at once, it struck Phoebe that this very Judge Pyncheon was the original of the miniature which the daguerreotypist had shown her in the garden, and that the hard, stern, relentless look now on his face was the same that the sun had so inflexibly persisted in bringing out. Was it, therefore, no momentary mood, but, however skillfully concealed, the settled temper of his life? And not merely so, but was it hereditary in him, and transmitted down, as a precious heirloom, from that bearded ancestor [...] as by a kind of prophecy? [...] It implied that the weaknesses and defects [...] 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[.]

Related Characters: Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Colonel Pyncheon, Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Not long after Phoebe sees Holgrave's daguerreotype of Judge Pyncheon, she meets the Judge himself in Hepzibah's shop. When Phoebe bashfully resists the Judge's kiss of greeting, she sees his pleasant expression shift suddenly into a much colder demeanor, confirming the fierce impression given in the daguerreotype. This gives Phoebe the impression that the Judge isn't simply in a bad mood—he is momentarily revealing his true colors. Because Phoebe wasn't raised within the Pyncheon orbit and has never met the Judge before, her bafflement, and the questions it raises in her mind, are meant to give an unbiased perspective on the Judge's character and on that of the Pyncheons as a whole. Her detachment and innocence also allow her to have a profounder insight on the nature of the Pyncheons' history than anyone else in the story does. Although most attribute the Pyncheons' misfortunes to a supernatural curse, Phoebe perceives that an internal moral rot, rather than some external force, underlies the family's trouble.

[B]esides these cold, formal, and empty words of the chisel that inscribes, the voice that speaks, and the pen that writes, for the public eye [...] there were traditions about the ancestor, and private diurnal gossip about the Judge, remarkably accordant in their testimony. It is often instructive to take the woman's, the private and domestic, view of a public man; nor can anything be more curious than the vast discrepancy between portraits intended for engraving and the pencil sketches that pass from hand to hand behind the original's back.

Related Characters: Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Colonel Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

After describing Phoebe's first encounter with Judge Pyncheon, the narrator discusses the contrast between public and private reputation. Hawthorne argues throughout the novel that there is often a distinction between what people present to the public and the way they truly are. This is especially the case with those who enjoy an eminent position in society, he argues. Such people attain their position through a combination of established rank, wealth, and external good deeds—yet such things can obscure the darker truth of a person's character. This is why privately-circulated traditions, even gossip, often deserve just as much of a hearing, in Hawthorne's view, as public reports of character. Not coincidentally, these private traditions are typically passed down by women and lower-class people—precisely those who do not have access to prominent positions in society. Phoebe and Hepzibah are examples of those who privately intuit the truth about Judge Pyncheon but who lack the means to counter his public reputation.

Phoebe [...] perplexed herself, meanwhile, with queries as to [...] whether judges, clergymen, and other characters of that eminent stamp and respectability could really, in any single instance, be otherwise than just and upright men. A doubt of this nature has a most disturbing influence, and, if shown to be a fact, comes with fearful and startling effect on minds of the trim, orderly, and limit-loving class, in which we find our little country girl. [...] A wider scope of view, and a deeper insight, may see rank, dignity, and station all proved illusory so far as regards their claim to human reverence, and yet not feel as if the universe were thereby tumbled headlong into chaos. But Phoebe, in order to keep the universe in its old place, was fain to smother, in some degree, her own intuitions as to Judge Pyncheon's character.

Related Characters: Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

This quote gets to the heart of Hawthorne's argument about appearances versus reality. It's fitting that he does so through the character of Phoebe, who symbolizes innocence in the novel. For Phoebe, it's shocking to consider that people—especially respected men who are at the top of society, like Judge Pyncheon—might not be what they seem. Whereas some people might take this notion for granted, the innocent Phoebe is profoundly unsettled by its implications. Through Phoebe's reaction, the narrator suggests that innocence like Phoebe's isn't harmless, because it is easily taken advantage of. For example, Phoebe avoids the cognitive dissonance she feels regarding Judge Pyncheon by simply stifling her sense that there is something morally wrong with him. This makes Phoebe, and others like her in society, all the more susceptible to those powerful figures who would use their status to corrupt and abuse others—a problem Hawthorne frequently highlights in his works.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ By the involuntarily effect of a genial temperament, Phoebe soon grew to be absolutely essential to the daily comfort, if not the daily life, of her two forlorn companions. The grime and sordidness of the House of the Seven Gables seemed to have vanished since her appearance there; the gnawing tooth of the dry rot was stayed among the old timbers of its skeleton frame; the dust had ceased to settle down so densely, from the antique ceilings, upon the floors and furniture of the rooms below—or, at any rate, there was a little housewife, as light-footed as the breeze that sweeps a garden walk, gliding hither and thither to brush it all away.

Related Characters: Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Hepzibah Pyncheon, Clifford Pyncheon, Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Phoebe's effect on the atmosphere surrounding her in the House of the Seven Gables. Her very presence transforms the centuries-old gloom and melancholy of the place and the sadness of its inhabitants. In contrast to Hepzibah, who struggles with anything practical, or Judge Pyncheon, who focuses on external reputation so as to conceal the rot inside him, Phoebe's transforming effect springs from inside her; it's both practical *and* spiritual. This means that, unlike the Judge who has something to hide, or Hepzibah who struggles to externalize her feelings, Phoebe's appearance conveys who she truly is, through an "involuntary effect." Phoebe's youthfulness and purity actually seems to halt the decay in the House of the Seven Gables, and she is unaffected by its darkness—for a brief time, anyway. In a similar way, Phoebe's innocence shines brightly against the House's legacy of greed and horror, and it even protects Clifford and Hepzibah as long as she is living there.

❝ Now, Phoebe's presence made a home about her—that very sphere which the outcast, the prisoner [...] instinctively pines after—a home! She was real! Holding her hand, you felt something; a tender something; a substance, and a warm one—and so long as you should feel its grasp, soft as it was, you might be certain that your place was good in the whole sympathetic chain of human nature. The world was no longer a delusion.

Related Characters: Hepzibah Pyncheon, Clifford Pyncheon, Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

Much like Phoebe has a transforming effect on her environment in the House of the Seven Gables, she has a similarly wholesome effect on the individuals within it—especially her cousin Clifford. Clifford has spent 30 years imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, which was devasting for the sensitive, tenderhearted man. He is no longer able to feel securely at home anywhere, until he meets Phoebe. Phoebe's inner purity makes any place a home—even the stagnant, haunted atmosphere of the Pyncheon mansion. Because Phoebe is so pure in herself—her inner goodness spilling over into her outer world—she has a genuineness and solidity that other characters lack. This sense of welcoming kindness gives Clifford something real to cling to for the first time in decades, reconnecting him to his own sense of humanity in the process. After befriending Phoebe, Clifford feels confident that at least something in the world around him—so much of which is deceptive—can finally be trusted.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Coming so late as it did, it was a kind of Indian summer, with a mist in its balmiest sunshine, and decay and death in its gaudiest delight. The more Clifford seemed to taste the happiness of a child, the sadder was the difference to be recognized. With a mysterious and terrible Past, which had annihilated his memory, and a blank Future before him, he had only this visionary and impalpable Now, which, if you once look closely at it, is nothing.

Related Characters: Clifford Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is an example of the complex role of time and change in the novel. Clifford, newly released from decades in prison, finds a tentative joy in the beauty of the Pyncheon garden, thanks to Phoebe's patient, cheerful company. In

fact, he even seems to become younger and more innocent. However, this happiness and renewed youth have an ambivalent quality to them: the happiness carries with it the constant reminder that, as genuine as it may be, it cannot last. Clifford cannot truly regain the youth he lost in prison, and that lost youth also robbed him of the ability to establish a meaningful future for himself after getting out. As a result, he has to content himself with the present moment, which is forever slipping into the empty future. In a sense, this makes Clifford at once the oldest and the youngest character in the novel, and his happiness is constantly haunted by the awareness of grief and loss. Hawthorne uses Clifford's plight as an especially poignant example of how family wrongdoing can consume the lives of those not directly responsible.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Clifford would, doubtless, have been glad to share their sports. One afternoon, he was seized with an irresistible desire to blow soap bubbles; an amusement, as Hepzibah told Phoebe apart, that had been a favorite one with her brother when they were both children. Behold him, therefore, at the arched window, with an earthen pipe in his mouth! Behold him, with his gray hair, and a wan, unreal smile over his countenance, […] Behold him, scattering airy spheres abroad, from the window into the street! Little impalpable worlds were those soap bubbles, with the big world depicted, in hues bright as imagination, on the nothing of their surface.

Related Characters: Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Phoebe Pyncheon, Hepzibah Pyncheon, Clifford Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

For a change of scenery, sometimes Phoebe takes Clifford to an upstairs window in the House of the Seven Gables. From here, they can overlook passersby on the street. This activity emphasizes how Clifford, having been imprisoned for 30 years, is a spectator of society, no longer able to participate meaningfully in it. However, he still finds ways to try—identifying especially strongly with the delights of children. This explains how he finds himself one day, blowing bubbles out the window and looking both disarmingly childlike and shockingly aged at the same time. The scene encapsulates Clifford's trapped situation—he can no longer relate to the real world, so he clings to fanciful memories of childhood which make him look endearing yet tragic to onlookers. The bubbles themselves, reflecting the outside world in such a fleeting way, also symbolize Clifford's thin connection to the larger world—one that tends to disappear as quickly as it materializes. The quote summarizes Clifford's tenuous position in society, a vulnerability which Judge Pyncheon—witnessing the bubble-blowing as he passes by—doesn't hesitate to exploit later on.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ [Holgrave] could talk sagely about the world's old age, but never actually believed what he said; he was a young man still, and therefore looked upon the world—that gray-bearded and wrinkled profligate, decrepit without being venerable—as a tender stripling, capable of being improved into all that it ought to be, but scarcely yet had shown the remotest promise of becoming. […] It seemed to Holgrave—as doubtless it has seemed to the hopeful of every century since the epoch of Adam's grandchildren—that in this age, more than ever before, the moss-grown and rotten Past is to be torn down, and lifeless institutions to be thrust out of the way, and their dead corpses buried, and everything to begin anew.

Related Characters: Holgrave

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Holgrave's attitude toward the past and progress, which is a major aspect of his character. Holgrave has a youthful optimism about the world's potential—he sees the world as being as young and full of potential as he himself is. Holgrave has remade himself many times, pursuing different careers and moving from place to place as it suits him; boarding at the House of the Seven Gables and being a daguerreotypist is just the latest version of himself. From his perspective, he believes that the world ought to be able to renew itself, too, constantly becoming a better version of itself. However, the narrator points to some of the weaknesses in Holgrave's outlook. For one thing, his attitude isn't new—every new generation tends to see the world as a reflection of itself. The narrator suggests that Holgrave's conviction that this age is different is a naïve one. In fact, because Holgrave is so determined to

see the past as disposable, it's suggested that he fails to use the past as a foundation upon which to build anew. His outlook, in other words, while perhaps understandable and even praiseworthy in itself, contains the seeds of its own undoing.

❝ [U]nder those seven gables, at which we now look up—and which old Colonel Pyncheon meant to be the house of his descendants, in prosperity and happiness, down to an epoch far beyond the present—under that roof, through a portion of three centuries, there has been perpetual remorse of conscience, a constantly defeated hope, strife amongst kindred, various misery, a strange form of death, dark suspicion, unspeakable disgrace—all or most of which calamity I have the means of tracing to the old Puritan's inordinate desire to plant and endow a family. To plant a family! This idea is at the bottom of most of the wrong and mischief which men do. The truth is, that, once in every half century, at longest, a family should be merged into the great, obscure mass of humanity, and forget all about its ancestors.

Related Characters: Holgrave (speaker), Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Colonel Pyncheon, Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

As Phoebe gets to know Holgrave, she wants to better understand his motivations—particularly why he lives at the House of the Seven Gables, a place that he admits to hating. Holgrave explains that the House is a kind of case study for him—a confirmation of a theory. He argues that Colonel Pyncheon's desire to establish a family dynasty is a fundamentally harmful motivation because it's rooted in greed. By seeking to endow his family with perpetual wealth, the Colonel actually doomed them to infighting, stagnation, and strife with neighbors. In Holgrave's opinion, family identity should be jettisoned in favor of a broader regard for humanity as a whole. The alternative is a situation like the residents of the House of the Seven Gables face: poverty, a dying-out family line, and the grief brought upon them by Judge Pyncheon's persistent greed. In his characteristic obsession with progress, Holgrave believes that the only way to avoid this corruption of the family is to tear down the institution itself.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ [The legend] here gives an account of some very strange behavior on the part of Colonel Pyncheon's portrait. This picture, it must be understood, was supposed to be so intimately connected with the fate of the house, and so magically built into its walls, that, if once it should be removed, that very instant the whole edifice would come thundering down in a heap of dusty ruin. All through the foregoing conversation between Mr. Pyncheon and the carpenter, the portrait had been frowning, clenching its fist, and giving many such proofs of excessive discomposure, but without attracting the notice of either of the two colloquists. And finally, at Matthew Maule's audacious suggestion of a transfer of the seven-gabled structure, the ghostly portrait is averred to have lost all patience, and to have shown itself on the point of descending bodily from its frame. But such incredible incidents are merely to be mentioned aside.

Related Characters: Holgrave (speaker), Matthew Maule (the carpenter), Colonel Pyncheon, Gervayse Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

This scene, a mix of horror and comedy, exemplifies Hawthorne's approach to the Gothic genre. For one thing, it occurs in the context of a short story Holgrave has written about the Pyncheons' history. Hawthorne often uses a distancing effect—in this case, a story-within-a-story—to create ambiguity as to whether supernatural events really occurred. Hawthorne also tends to temper alarming supernatural events with an intentional element of lightness or hilarity. The overall effect allows Hawthorne to reinforce his thesis about horror versus innocence—that, regardless of the truth of the supernatural elements, the bigger horror is what human beings inflict on one another. In this case, Colonel Pyncheon's portrait rages in the background of Matthew Maule and Gervayse Pyncheon's argument over the fate of the House of the Seven Gables, but the other men do not notice (or they assume that the sight is the effect of alcohol). The reader is encouraged to suppose that such an "incredible incident" may be safely ignored.

But, alas for the beautiful, the gentle, yet too haughty Alice! A power that she little dreamed of had laid its grasp upon her maiden soul. A will, most unlike her own, constrained her do its grotesque and fantastic bidding. Her father, as it proved, had martyred his poor child to an inordinate desire for measuring his land by miles instead of acres. And, therefore, while Alice Pyncheon lived, she was Maule's slave, in a bondage more humiliating, a thousandfold, than that which binds its chain around the body. Seated by his humble fireside, Maule had but to wave his hand; and, wherever the proud lady chanced to be—whether in her chamber, or entertaining her father's stately guests, or worshipping at church—whatever her place of occupation, her spirit passed from beneath her own control, and bowed itself to Maule.

Related Characters: Holgrave (speaker), Matthew Maule (the carpenter), Alice Pyncheon, Gervayse Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

In pointed contrast to the lighthearted effect of the earlier scene with the animated portrait, this scene in Holgrave's short story is one of undiluted horror. Matthew Maule the carpenter convinces Gervayse Pyncheon that he can locate the deed for the long-lost Pyncheon property by using Gervayse's daughter Alice as a medium. Unbeknownst to Pyncheon, Maule uses this opportunity to gain control of Alice's spirit, effectively enslaving her by forcing her to do his bidding. This comes about, as Holgrave writes, because of Pyncheon's inordinate greed, which allows him to justify Maule's meddling in his daughter's mind. Thus, this quote is an example of just how corrupting and degrading the desire for wealth can be, and also of how helpless innocence can be in the face of power that does not hesitate to manipulate the vulnerable. Coming after the more lighthearted scene, this scene furthers Hawthorne's point that the most fearful horror comes from the effects of greed, pride, and hatred—any supernatural influences are secondary to human beings' inherent capabilities.

Chapter 14 Quotes

"I shall never be so merry as before I knew Cousin Hepzibah and poor Cousin Clifford. I have grown a great deal older, in this little time. Older, and, I hope, wiser, and—not exactly sadder, but, certainly, with not half so much lightness in my spirits! I have given them my sunshine, and have been glad to give it; but, of course, I cannot both give and keep it. They are welcome, notwithstanding!"

Related Characters: Phoebe Pyncheon (speaker), Clifford Pyncheon, Hepzibah Pyncheon, Holgrave

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

As Phoebe prepares to temporarily leave the House of the Seven Gables, she tells Holgrave about the House's effect on her over the weeks she has spent there. Phoebe (whose name literally means "bright") has been the light and life of the decrepit House and its sorrowful inhabitants. However, despite her genuine wholesomeness and innocence, she has not been untouched by the House's history and its attendant curse—the atmosphere has sapped some of her youth and has aged her, at least emotionally. The House lacks enough life in itself to restore what Phoebe has sacrificed to it, so Phoebe's willingness to do this shows how selfless she really is. However, her departure also has a deeply-felt impact on the House. Not only do Hepzibah's and Clifford's moods decline, but the House literally seems colder and darker, and a storm sets in for days—all showing how vital Phoebe's light is to the Pyncheons' ancestral house.

Chapter 15 Quotes

The Judge, beyond all question, was a man of eminent respectability. The church acknowledged it; the state acknowledged it. It was denied by nobody. [...] Nor [...] did Judge Pyncheon himself, probably, entertain many or very frequent doubts that his enviable reputation accorded with his deserts. His conscience, therefore [...] bore an accordant testimony with the world's laudatory voice.

Related Characters: Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Hepzibah Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is an excellent example of Hawthorne's thesis that power corrupts—but that corruption manifests itself in manifold ways. Hawthorne argues that outward status tends to protect eminent people from others' scrutiny, and that it tends to discourage people of status from searching their own hearts. Judge Pyncheon is a prime example of this phenomenon. The Judge's external reputation is impeccable in the eyes of church, state, and general public. This reputation tends to reinforce the Judge's self-perception. In other words, he takes the general public's view of himself as the truth, which has the effect of muffling any whispers of doubt within his own conscience. The more he does this, the less room there is for any opposing view to mar his understanding of himself. Hepzibah, in fact, is the only one who doubts the Judge's character. She is an example of someone without power who, in Hawthorne's view, deserves to be listened to over the many voices of those who have power or who want to reinforce it.

❝ Men of strong minds, great force of character, and a hard texture of the sensibilities are very capable of falling into mistakes of this kind. They are ordinarily men to whom forms are of paramount importance. Their field of action lies among the external phenomena of life. They possess vast ability in grasping, and arranging, and appropriating to themselves the big, heavy, solid unrealities, such as gold, landed estate, offices of trust and emolument, and public honors. With these materials, and with deeds of goodly aspect, done in the public eye, an individual of this class builds up, as it were, a tall and stately edifice, which, in the view of other people, and ultimately in his own view, is no other than the man's character, or the man himself. Behold, therefore, a palace!

Related Characters: Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon, Clifford Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

Hawthorne argues that people who possess power and status are susceptible to silencing their own consciences. Here, the narrator suggest that this is especially the case when public figures center their lives around "external phenomena," like property, distinction, and the accumulation of wealth. When people become preoccupied with things of this sort, they come to believe that such things are the most important realities in life. This, in turn, discourages them from looking within. Another problem with such a focus on externalities is that it encourages people, most egregiously Judge Pyncheon, to equate their public persona with their internal character—a situation he likens to the building of an edifice, or palace. Such a palace (or, say, a house) can deceive oneself or others into believing that the beautiful exterior mirrors a similar internal reality. This situation upholds people in their powerful positions, and it can allow oppression of others, as well as many other forms of corruption, to persist. Judge Pyncheon's suppression of his own wrongdoing (letting Clifford take the fall for Uncle Jaffrey's death, even though the Judge knew the truth) is the novel's clearest example of this.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ At last, therefore, and after so long estrangement from everything that the world acted or enjoyed, they had been drawn into the great current of human life, and were swept away with it, as by the suction of fate itself.

Still haunted with the idea that not one of the past incidents, inclusive of Judge Pyncheon's visit, could be real, the recluse of the Seven Gables murmured in her brother's ear: "Clifford! Clifford! Is not this a dream?"

"A dream, Hepzibah!" repeated he, almost laughing in her face. "On the contrary, I have never been awake before!"

Related Characters: Clifford Pyncheon, Hepzibah Pyncheon (speaker), Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

After Judge Pyncheon's death, Clifford and Hepzibah flee the House of the Seven Gables. The contrast between their flight and their long seclusion in the House is surreal and dizzying. They even catch a train into the countryside, symbolizing their sudden transition not just into human society, but into the cutting edge of society. To Hepzibah, these events are overwhelming, pulling her rapidly outside of the limited sphere in which she has spent her entire life

and (until recently) acted as Clifford's guardian and provider. For Clifford, on the other hand, the shock of these events is exactly what he needs to pull him back into society, as he has been longing to do. He has escaped the House whose curse has haunted his entire life, allowing him to determine his own course for the first time in his life. The Pyncheons' escape at first suggests that it's possible to outrun the hold that the House and its curse have on its inhabitants. However, this soon proves to be illusory.

❝ You are aware, my dear sir […] that all human progress is in a circle; or, to use a more accurate and beautiful figure, in an ascending spiral curve. While we fancy ourselves going straight forward, and attaining, at every step, an entirely new position of affairs, we do actually return to something long ago hied and abandoned, but which we now find etherealized, refined, and perfected to its ideal. […] [Railroads] give us wings; they annihilate the toil and dust of pilgrimage; they spiritualize travel! […] Why, therefore, should [man] build a more cumbrous habitation than can readily be carried off with him?

Related Characters: Clifford Pyncheon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

On the train, Clifford gets into a conversation with another passenger about the nature of train travel and, by extension, about progress in general. Clifford suggests that progress doesn't go in a straight line. Rather, humanity keeps circling back to things that have been tried and abandoned before, and those old things are refined and transformed into something new and better. Railroads are an example—Clifford describes railroad travel as a "spiritualization" and improvement of ancient, nomadic ways of life. This is because railroads could theoretically allow people to jettison permanent, physical homes, he thinks, and travel from place to place at will. It turns out that, rather than being a consciously formulated idea, this is more of an ecstatic expression of Clifford's newfound emancipation from the House that has kept him imprisoned his whole life. However, it also supports Hawthorne's point that progress isn't the exclusive to young people, and that the perspective gleaned from an individual's personal struggle often informs their ideas about progress to a considerable degree.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ And it was in this hour, so full of doubt and awe, that the one miracle was wrought without which every human existence is a blank. The bliss which makes all things true, beautiful, and holy shone around this youth and maiden. They were conscious of nothing sad nor old. They transfigured the earth, and made it Eden again, and themselves the two first dwellers in it. The dead man, so close beside them, was forgotten. At such a crisis, there is no death; for immortality is revealed anew, and embraces everything in its hallowed atmosphere.

Related Characters: Judge Pyncheon (Cousin Jaffrey), Holgrave, Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes what happens when Phoebe arrives back at the House of the Seven Gables the day after Judge Pyncheon's death. The preceding chapter prepared the audience for a terrible consummation of events, as the Judge's body lingered in the House's parlor and passersby speculated about the uncannily vacant shop. But these expectations are dramatically undercut when Holgrave draws Phoebe into the house and declares his love for her. In a symbolic rebirth (a return to the innocence of a kind of biblical "Eden"), Phoebe's and Holgrave's love transforms a house marked by hatred, strife, and death into a place that connotes new life and the healing of centuries-old wrongs. Indeed, it is soon revealed that Holgrave is a descendant of the Maule family, and his impending marriage to Phoebe suggests that the longstanding feud between the two families can finally be laid to rest. With Judge Pyncheon's corpse lingering nearby, this quote also exemplifies the close proximity of horror and innocence throughout the novel as a whole.

Chapter 21 Quotes

"My dearest Phoebe," said Holgrave, "how will it please you to assume the name of Maule? As for the secret, it is the only inheritance that has come down to me from my ancestors. You should have known sooner (only that I was afraid of frightening you away) that, in this long drama of wrong and retribution, I represent the old wizard, and am probably as much a wizard as ever he was. The son of the executed Matthew Maule, while building this house, took the opportunity to construct that recess, and hide away the Indian deed, on which depended the immense land claim of the Pyncheons. Thus they bartered their Eastern territory for Maule's garden ground.

Related Characters: Holgrave (speaker), Thomas Maule, Matthew Maule, Phoebe Pyncheon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 222

Explanation and Analysis

This quote resolves the lingering mysteries in the novel. After it's decided that Phoebe and her relatives will leave the House of the Seven Gables and move to the late Judge's country estate, the family speculates about whatever became of the fabled property deed which never materialized. It turns out that Holgrave has known the answer all along: the worthless deed is tucked into a recess behind Colonel Pyncheon's portrait. Thus, the portrait, and the House itself, have contained the truth of the mystery all along. The fact that the wronged Maules hid the deed—leading to centuries of mistrust, suffering, and even murder among the Pyncheons—shows how deeply the curse has run for all these years. The Maules may have been responsible for the mystery, but the Pyncheons' greed was really just allowed to run its course and do its own mischief. As Hawthorne has argued throughout the book, greed does more damage than any supposed curse could.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

Hawthorne classifies his work as a "romance," not a novel. A novel, he explains, is supposed to adhere very closely to ordinary experience. A romance, on the other hand, must present the truth of the human heart, but it may do so with greater creativity on the author's part. The author may "mellow the lights and deepen [...] the shadows" as he sees fit. However, he must exercise that privilege modestly and "mingle the Marvelous" into the narrative in a delicate way.

Though Hawthorne draws a distinction between a romance and a novel (he understands the latter to be more realistic than the former), today The House of the Seven Gables *is classified as a Gothic novel today—a novel which incorporates supernatural and romantic elements.*

The House of the Seven Gables is a romance because the author seeks to connect the past with the present. That "legendary mist" may be disregarded, or it may create a "picturesque" effect around the events and characters described; that is up to the reader.

Hawthorne extends freedom to the reader to take the more "legendary" aspects of the story in the spirit they prefer; the meanings he intends will implicitly come across either way.

This book also has a moral: "the truth [...] that the wrongdoing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and [...] becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief." Hawthorne hopes that this romance might convince readers that passing down wealth or property is foolish and has a damaging effect on posterity. However, he acknowledges that when romances succeed in teaching a lesson, it's usually a moral more subtle than the stated one. Finally, Hawthorne adds that the characters and location described in the story are of his own invention and are not meant to be a commentary on an actual town or family.

One of the primary meanings Hawthorne intends to convey is that wrongdoing has repercussions over many generations—especially where wealth and property are concerned. However, he encourages readers to be alert to more subtle messages, too. Although the precise setting of the story is not named, Hawthorne was inspired by a gabled mansion in his hometown of Salem, Massachusetts.

CHAPTER 1: THE OLD PYNCHEON FAMILY

In a New England town stands a wooden **house** with seven peaked gables and a clustered chimney. It is the Pyncheon house, which stands on Pyncheon Street and has a massive tree, the Pyncheon Elm, before the door. The mansion is almost 200 years old, and its weather-beaten exterior bears evidence of its long life. It is known as the House of the Seven Gables.

The titular House of the Seven Gables will be almost like a character in the story itself, symbolizing the history, aspirations, and struggles of the Pyncheon family.

The story is set not long before the present day (i.e., the mid-1800s), but it will be told with reference to older events. From those events may be drawn the lesson that "the act of the passing generation [...] must produce good or evil fruit in a far-distant time."

Hawthorne restates the story's moral and also justifies the novel's recurrent use of older events. The appeal to history is not for mere antiquity's sake, but to illustrate the outworking of good and evil over successive generations.

The **House** of the Seven Gables wasn't the first dwelling to be built on this ground. Originally, a cottager named Matthew Maule lived here, on the site of a freshwater spring. After 30 or 40 years, a powerful citizen, Colonel Pyncheon, desires this tract of land, and he acquires a grant from the legislature in order to secure it. Colonel Pyncheon has an iron will—but Matthew Maule, though an obscure man, proves to be equally stubborn. He manages to hold onto his land for several years, with the dispute undecided.

The history traced in the novel will center on the House of the Seven Gables, which itself came about because of a stubborn desire to increase one's wealth. Colonel Pyncheon's greed will set a pattern for his posterity, as if it pervades the very ground on which the Pyncheon family lives.

Matthew Maule is executed for witchcraft—a "terrible delusion" to which the influential were just as susceptible as the mob. It is later remembered that Colonel Pyncheon had condemned Maule with a special zeal. The moment before Maule is executed, he addresses a "prophecy" to Colonel Pyncheon: "God will give him blood to drink!"

The narrator refers to the Salem Witch Trials of 1692, in which approximately 200 people were accused of practicing witchcraft and about 20 were executed. Within just a few years, judges confessed to having made a tragic error. Colonel Pyncheon is an example of an eminent person who is just as susceptible to "mob" thinking as a person of low status is often be assumed to be.

After Maule's death, Colonel Pyncheon begins to build a huge mansion on Maule's former property. Gossips speculates that, given Maule's reputation for being a wizard, Pyncheon and his posterity will surely be haunted. The Colonel cannot be dissuaded, however. Not long after the foundation is dug, Maule's spring turns from freshwater to saltwater, as it remains today. The head carpenter and architect of Pyncheon's mansion happens to be Maule's son, Thomas. Neither Pyncheon nor Thomas have any scruple about such an arrangement.

Colonel Pyncheon wasted no time in building on the ruins of Maule's property (or his life), suggesting a callousness about the man's death. The impurity in the springwater suggests a judgment on Pyncheon's actions. Meanwhile, Maule's son's involvement in building the house hints that the two families will remain intertwined.

After the **House** of the Seven Gables is built, a festival and dedication is held. The Rev. Mr. Higginson prays and preaches, and there is a plentiful feast for the community. Crowds gather to admire the imposing new house, which is three stories tall. Besides its many gables and great chimney, the house is decorated with Gothic figures, diamond-shaped windows, and a sundial. Both town leaders and common folk throng the entrance, which is as large as a church door. However, they're met only by two servants, not by Colonel Pyncheon himself. Even the colony's lieutenant governor receives no personal greeting.

The big housewarming celebration, complete with a feast, sermon, and prominent guests, shows Colonel Pyncheon's importance to the town. The House itself—spacious, ornate, and expensive—displays Pyncheon's aspirations for himself and his family. But the Colonel's failure to greet guests in person, especially important ones, is a major social blunder.

When the county sheriff reprimands the chief servant for failing to summon Colonel Pyncheon, the servant nervously explains that the Colonel had insisted on not being disturbed. The lieutenant governor, however, takes matters into his own hands and knocks on the door of the Colonel's private study. There's no answer. He then tries knocking with the hilt of his sword, and still getting no response, barges inside.

The lieutenant governor's actions show that the Colonel's failure to appear is considered a major affront to his guests. Given Pyncheon's evident desire to maintain favor within the town, his lack of response to the knocks builds tension.

A sudden gust of wind blows the door open. Everyone crowds into the darkened study, where Colonel Pyncheon sits in an oak chair beneath his own likeness in a **portrait**. He seems to be frowning. Suddenly, the Colonel's grandson darts forward and begins shrieking in terror. The crowd realizes that Colonel Pyncheon's face is distorted, and there is blood on his ruff; his beard, too, is saturated with blood. He is dead! Someone among the group is said to have repeated Matthew Maule's prophecy, "God hath given him blood to drink!"

Elements of Gothic horror—the mysteriously blown door, the horrifying corpse, the muttered curse—appear in the story for the first time. The Colonel's portrait remains a significant element in the story—it captures the Colonel's personality, allowing him to brood over the House and family even after his death. The Colonel's death is the founding event for the family story, even more than the construction of the House itself.

There are many rumors surrounding Colonel Pyncheon's death: some think there were indications of violence, and that perhaps someone had climbed in the open window behind him. One person claims to have briefly seen a skeleton hand at the Colonel's throat. Doctors argue, one claiming a case of apoplexy. Ultimately, however, the coroner's jury can only decide "Sudden Death."

The ambiguity surrounding the Colonel's death accords with Hawthorne's and the narrator's intentional ambiguity surrounding all supernatural elements in the novel—the reader is left to interpret them as they see fit. Regardless, there is something ominous and rather suspicious about the Colonel's sudden demise.

It is hard to imagine that Colonel Pyncheon could have been murdered. He was such an eminent figure, after all, that his case was exhaustively investigated. Only tradition claims that anything unseemly occurred in connection with his death. The Rev. Mr. Higginson's funeral sermon described the Colonel's death as a seasonable one—he had completed all his earthly duties and provided for future generations.

The powerful often enjoy a cleaner reputation than the insignificant, as the contrast between the Colonel's and Matthew Maule's deaths suggests. However, the narrator later points out that, sometimes, privately-circulated tradition proves to be more trustworthy than publicly-attested claims.

At the time of the Colonel's death, it does appear that the Pyncheon family is destined for prosperity. In addition to the **House** of the Seven Gables, the Pyncheons possess a grant for a large tract in the unsettled wilderness of Maine—larger than the territory of some European princes. This tract is expected to greatly enrich the Pyncheons. However, the Colonel dies before he can put affairs in order regarding this property claim, and his son, who is neither as eminent nor as forceful, is unable to do so because a vital piece of documentation has gone missing.

By all appearances, the Pyncheons could look forward to a prosperous future despite the Colonel's unseasonable death. But the matter of the Maine territory will continue to haunt future generations as an example of the way that aspirations of increased wealth can bedevil people's fortunes, whether or not the wealth is ever attained.

For the next hundred years, Pyncheons try to legally obtain the territory, but it's eventually regranted and settled. Nevertheless, the Pyncheon family continues to act as if this land claim grants them—even the poorest among them—potential nobility. Among the weaker Pyncheons, this encourages a kind of "sluggishness and dependence."

The Pyncheons become obsessed with obtaining the elusive wilderness territory in order to further enrich themselves. Even when they fail to do so, they act as if they possess the status that such wealth affords them. Such entitlement stops many Pyncheons from trying to make something of their lives here and now.

Subsequent generations of Puncheons continue to cling to the **House** of the Seven Gables, but some seem doubtful about their rights to the property. Legally, their right is certain, but Matthew Maule "[plants] a heavy footstep […] on the conscience" of many Puncheons—to the point that it seems truer to say that the Puncheons inherited a misfortune rather than a fortune.

Even the Puncheons' ownership of the House of the Seven Gables is haunted by doubts, suggesting that one generation's actions weigh heavily on the consciences of those not directly responsible.

Popular rumors continue to circulate regarding the Puncheons and Maule's curse, especially since, about 100 years ago, another Puncheon died under circumstances similar to the Colonel's. The Colonel's **portrait** continues to brood darkly over the study in which he'd died. It seems as if his ghost is "doomed to become the Evil Genius" of the Puncheon family.

Multiple Puncheons die in a way that suggests that, per Maule's curse, God has "given them blood to drink." The phrase "Evil Genius" (derived from the word "genie") simply refers to the spirit that attends a person or place—or as in this case, one that attends a whole family.

More recently, the most notable event in the Puncheon family was a murder, which took place about 30 years ago: a nephew was convicted of the murder of his uncle, but because of his family connections, he was spared the death penalty and imprisoned for life instead. The wealthy bachelor uncle who'd been killed was "eccentric and melancholy," with an interest in family history. This research led him to believe that Matthew Maule had been cheated out of his property and probably his life. His conscience urged him to give up the property or at least to provide for the same in his will, but loyalty to family apparently outweighed his scruples.

The most recent death in the Puncheon family has repercussions for living descendants. An eccentric uncle (of whom more will be said later in the story) felt burdened by the guilt associated with his inheritance, and this led to his own untimely death, showing how the Maule curse seems to be working itself out in various ways over subsequent generations.

After his death, the uncle's property, including the **House** of the Seven Gables, passes into the hands of his nephew, Judge Puncheon, a cousin of the alleged murderer. This nephew led a dissipated youth and then reformed to become a respectable member of society. After studying the law and becoming a judge, he entered politics and served in Congress and the state legislature. He now lives on a country estate a few miles outside of town.

Judge Puncheon seems like the ideal Puncheon. Despite a questionable past, he has become a respectable civil servant—ostensibly someone with the potential to overcome the family's haunted history. But Judge Puncheon will become the novel's most prominent example of someone whose appearances are deceiving.

There are very few Puncheons left. The Judge is known to have one son, who is currently traveling in Europe. Besides the imprisoned cousin, there is also the cousin's sister who lives in seclusion in the **House** of the Seven Gables, Uncle Jaffrey having granted her a life estate. She is very poor but refuses the Judge's monetary support. The only other remaining Puncheon is Phoebe, a country girl of 17 who is the daughter of a deceased cousin of the Judge's.

After the survey of the Puncheons' history, the story is brought up to the present day—to a rather unpromising, declining family line. A "life estate" means that the House of the Seven Gables belonged to the cousin for the duration of her life. It would revert to the Judge upon her death.

It is supposed that Matthew Maule's descendants have died out, but they continued living quietly in town for a long time, seeming to harbor no ill will against the Pyncheons. Perhaps they have even forgotten about their connection to the Pyncheons. Established rank and wealth have a way of seeming right and proper, stifling questions in humbler minds. The Maules continued living in poverty and obscurity, generally working as tradesmen. They have an "indefinable peculiarity" with keeps others at arm's length, and superstitious rumors circulate. In any case, nobody has heard of a Maule for the past 30 years.

The Maules live on, too—but, as often happens in the story, those of lower rank remain in relative obscurity. In fact, the Pyncheons' prominence dominates the town to such an extent that it is taken for granted as natural, even by those who've suffered because of the Pyncheons' greed. The narrator suggests that this often occurs in situations of social inequality.

Surrounding the **House** of the Seven Gables, a modest neighborhood has grown up. The house itself continues to loom there "like a great human heart [...] full of rich and somber reminiscences." The roof is covered with green moss, and in a nook between two of the gables, flower shrubs are growing. These are called Alice's Posies because Alice Pyncheon, long dead, is said to have tossed seeds onto the roof, where they eventually grew, taking on a melancholy beauty.

The House continues to be portrayed like a character—a kind of repository of human experience. By now, the House is showing its age. However, it is not without beauty and the possibility of renewed life, as the flowers symbolically suggest.

In the front gable, there is a shop door—a source of mortification to the current resident. About a century ago, the head of the Pyncheon family fell into financial difficulties and decided to run a shop out of his home. But as soon as the man died, the shop door was locked and barred, the shop left just as it had been.

For a family that has prided itself on its wealth (even after that wealth became largely illusory), being in a lower-class trade, like shopkeeping, would be seen as a source of great embarrassment, worthy of being forgotten.

CHAPTER 2: THE LITTLE SHOPWINDOW

Hepzibah Pyncheon wakes before sunrise. She is alone in the **House** of the Seven Gables, except for a young man, a **daguerreotypist**, who has been lodging in one of the gables for the past three months. Hepzibah has lived as a recluse for the past quarter-century, but today will be different. With heavy sighs, the "old maid" says her prayers and readies herself for the day.

The novel shifts from the largely expository nature of the first chapter to a more conventional narrative with the story of Hepzibah, the House's current occupant. Hepzibah's reclusive existence as an "old maid" is in keeping with a family that's dying out even while clinging to its upper-class ideals.

Before leaving her chamber, Hepzibah unlocks a drawer in her desk and withdraws a small miniature **portrait**. It's a likeness of a delicate-looking young man in old-fashioned dress. Hepzibah's devotion to this figure has been her sole passion in life.

The identity of the young man isn't revealed for the time being; but, like other artworks in the story, his portrait accurately reveals his inner character.

At last, dressed in rustling black silks and a turban, Hepzibah leaves her chamber and feels her way nearsightedly toward the stairs. She enters a dark-paneled parlor, which, among other furnishings, contains a high-backed oaken chair, a rather fantastical illustrated map of the old Pyncheon territory, and a forbidding **portrait** of Colonel Pyncheon, complete with Bible and sword. Hepzibah scowls toward the portrait, but the scowl is a result of her poor eyesight; she actually reveres the pictured ancestor. Hepzibah's scowl has given her a reputation for being ill-tempered, but "her heart never frowned." She is actually tender-hearted and sensitive.

Hepzibah's life remains surrounded by the trappings of the Pyncheon history and alleged fortune, even 200 years after the fact. Hepzibah is an example of a character whose exterior contradicts her interior—she is much more capable of love and tenderness than her frowning, dowdy exterior suggests.

In the adjacent shop, a transformation has occurred: cobwebs have been swept away, and the interior has been scrubbed. Barrels of flour, apples, and other goods have appeared, as well as soap, candles, and dry goods like sugar, beans, and peas. There's even a variety of candy and gingerbread cookies. Sighing but purposeful, Hepzibah enters the shop and begins rearranging some of the toys and treats, looking ludicrous as she does so—and yet there's a lingering trace of gentility at the same time. There is an undeniable melancholy about the Pyncheon heiress—prompted by a newly emergent circumstance—reduced to being "the hucksteress of a cent shop." As the town stirs to life, Hepzibah can delay no longer, and she unbars the shop door—then immediately withdraws into the parlor to weep.

Hepzibah is portrayed as both a sympathetic and a rather pitiable character, at once clinging to the world of her upbringing and trying, with varying success, to embrace an entirely new one. The term "huckster" simply refers to a seller of small items and, in this instance, doesn't necessarily have the modern connotation of a dishonest peddler. Nevertheless, the circumstances feel shameful to Hepzibah, who has spent her entire life believing that she is above such things.

CHAPTER 3: THE FIRST CUSTOMER

In her grief, Hepzibah is startled by the tinkling of the shop bell: her first customer has arrived. When she rushes into the shop, however, she finds a young gentleman of 21 or 22, well-dressed and looking both grave and vigorous. It's Holgrave, the **daguerreotypist**, who has come to offer well-wishes. At this expression of sympathy, Hepzibah bursts into fresh tears and says she cannot go through with the shop opening. Holgrave comforts her, saying that even frightening things, once confronted, lose their terror.

Holgrave represents rationality in the story, helping Hepzibah look at her situation reasonably and pointing out that terror—whether relatively mundane things like opening a store, or the more characteristically "Gothic" terrors that will emerge later in the story—is less horrible when directly confronted.

Holgrave also encourages her to think of this as a new stage in her life—one more active and purposeful. After all, nowadays, gentility is associated more with restriction than with privilege; he thinks Hepzibah is acting heroically by giving it up. Hepzibah says she will never understand these "new notions," but that she appreciates his support. He offers to be Hepzibah's first customer by purchasing some biscuits, but she gives them to Holgrave free of charge.

Holgrave is also the character who is most concerned with societal progress, which is why he sees Hepzibah as representing a bygone era that is deservedly being laid to rest. Hepzibah's business efforts on her household's behalf are a repudiation of leisured gentility.

Hepzibah feels ashamed when strangers peek at the goods displayed in her shop window. She also hears two laborers chatting outside. One of them, Dixey, criticizes Hepzibah's scowl, and his companion adds that his own wife tried running a shop but failed. Dixey predicts that it will be a "poor business." Just as Hepzibah is sure that no customer will ever cross her threshold, the bell tinkles again. A red-cheeked, frizzy-haired schoolboy, Ned Higgins, enters and asks for the gingerbread cookie displayed in the window. She gives it to him for free. Two minutes later, he returns for another, and this time, Hepzibah demands the one-cent payment.

Hepzibah, for her part, has not fully reconciled herself to the reality of being a shopkeeper, especially the intrusion on her privacy (hence her dignity) that this new venture represents. However, with Ned Higgins, she begins to gain some shrewdness about her newfound trade.

By this time, Hepzibah is finally calm. Invigorated by novelty and effort, she even permits herself an extra spoonful of sugar in her tea. As the morning progresses, however, several more customers straggle in, and Hepzibah endures several rebukes for failing to have root beer or yeast in stock. She is most dismayed by certain customers' superior airs, imagining that her genteel roots are evident and should still be respected. Even worse is other customers' sympathetic tones. Eventually, a genuine scowl crosses her face as she begins to resent the "idle aristocracy" to which she had so recently belonged.

Hepzibah is painfully aware of her ambiguous status—she is between different classes, neither genteel nor of the merchant class. Even though her roots are as socially respected as those of some of her customers, she no longer belongs to their world—and both their derision and their pity rankle her already sensitive spirit.

CHAPTER 4: A DAY BEHIND THE COUNTER

Around noon, a portly, opulently-dressed gentleman with a gold-headed cane passes by on the opposite side of the street and studies Hepzibah's shop window through a pair of spectacles. He almost enters the shop, but Ned Higgins goes in ahead of him, and by the time Hepzibah has sold the boy his third cookie of the day, the man has gone. Hepzibah mutters, "Take it as you like, Cousin Jaffrey!"

"Cousin Jaffrey" is not to be confused with Uncle *Jaffrey, the relative who died under mysterious circumstances 30 years ago; the younger Jaffrey is the well-respected Judge Pyncheon. Here, it's evident that there is bad blood between Hepzibah and her cousin.*

Inside, Hepzibah paces, coming to a stop before Colonel Pyncheon's **portrait**. She trembles, imagining that the Colonel's hard expression reveals the truth of Cousin Jaffrey's character, too. She also calls to mind the softer, more sensitive expression on the miniature she'd studied that morning. Sadly, she reflects that "they persecuted his mother in him! He never was a Pyncheon!"

In contrast to the Colonel and the Judge, who show a hardness of heart, the figure in the miniature doesn't take after the men in his family, which Hepzibah feels made him vulnerable to persecution.

Then the shop bell summons Hepzibah again, and she finds a wrinkled, nearly toothless man in a patched-together outfit, a longtime neighbor named Uncle Venner. He is a tough and vigorous old man who does errands like wood-splitting, digging, and snow-shoveling to support himself, taking a clergyman-like interest in the families who employ him. Though he has long been regarded as mentally deficient, he offers a poetic sort of homespun wisdom, and Hepzibah likes him.

Uncle Venner is an example of someone who, like several other characters, is more complex than his outward appearance suggests. However, unlike some of those others—such as Judge Pyncheon, whose cruel side Hepzibah has just been thinking about—Uncle Venner is wiser than he looks.

Uncle Venner speaks kindly to Hepzibah about her new venture, saying that it's good for young people not to remain idle. For his own part, he means to retire to the farm—what others call the workhouse—in a few years. Uncle Venner mentions seeing Judge Pyncheon on the street and wonders why *he* doesn't provide for Hepzibah; Hepzibah says it is her business, not the Judge's, if she chooses to earn her own bread. Uncle Venner gives Hepzibah some advice on commerce and then asks her when she expects "him" home. Hepzibah shuts down this conversation, too.

The "workhouse" refers to the almshouse which sheltered those in a town who were too poor to provide for themselves. Uncle Venner's whimsical humor shows genuine concern for Hepzibah, but she is accustomed to fending for herself and especially scorns Judge Pyncheon's help. She is also motivated by the impending arrival of a mysterious "him."


Hepzibah daydreams through the rest of the day, making many blunders and selling her entire stock of gingerbread to Ned Higgins. As she's finally closing down the shop, an omnibus stops outside, sending Hepzibah's heart into her throat. However, a slender, cheery young girl alights. Hepzibah realizes it is Phoebe, a distant Pyncheon cousin, who has arrived unannounced for a visit. As Hepzibah opens the door to welcome her, she resolves that Phoebe can only stay for one night, lest Clifford be disturbed.

Hepzibah obviously expects someone else to emerge from the omnibus (a horse-drawn cab). Phoebe's arrival introduces a character whose innocence and unfamiliarity with the House of the Seven Gables, which may give an alternate perspective on events involving this otherwise insular family.

CHAPTER 5: MAY AND NOVEMBER

That night, Phoebe sleeps in a chamber overlooking the house's old garden. The next morning, she is awakened by the dawn. Spotting a white rosebush from her window, she goes down to the garden to gather flowers to decorate her room. Phoebe has a gift for "practical arrangement"—for seeing the potential of the things around her and for making any place feel like home.

Phoebe's contrast to Hepzibah is immediately apparent—she is much more at ease in her surroundings than her less practical, elderly cousin, and her youthful innocence seems to beautify everything around her. The imagery of an innocent maiden is common in Gothic literature.

On Phoebe's way back downstairs, Hepzibah calls her into her chamber and tells Phoebe that she doesn't see how Phoebe can stay with her for any length of time. She explains that neither the **house** nor her own temperament are suitable for a young girl, and she can't even be sure of feeding her. Phoebe replies that she was not brought up a Pyncheon and, having learned a lot in her home village, intends to earn her own bread. Hepzibah also explains that she will soon have to provide for another. She shows Phoebe the miniature of Clifford, of whom Phoebe has never heard. But since Phoebe is undeterred, Hepzibah agrees to let her remain for the time being.

Phoebe continues to present a contrast to the other Pyncheons with her undaunted sense of initiative. Even Hepzibah is won over by Phoebe's warmth, which dispels some of the House's gloomy atmosphere.

Phoebe cheerfully makes breakfast, breaking into song now and then. Hepzibah gets out an old family tea-set which has seldom been used. Admiring the careful way that Phoebe washes the cups, Hepzibah praises her as "a nice little housewife," something she obviously must have gotten from her mother's side. Just as they are sitting down to breakfast, the shop bell rings, and Phoebe jumps up to answer it, explaining that she has a knack for sales as well.

Phoebe is everything Hepzibah is not—besides being young, energetic, and cheerful, she is domestically inclined, demonstrative, and business-oriented. She is the opposite of Hepzibah's aloof gentility.

Hepzibah watches with genuine admiration as Phoebe successfully barters with an old lady in the shop, and she agrees to Phoebe's various proposals for improving business, all the while telling herself that Phoebe can never be a "lady," since she is not a Pyncheon. Phoebe, indeed, is an example of feminine grace in a "plebeian" sense, while Hepzibah, with her self-consciousness of being an "educated lady," is a model of older gentility.

Even as Hepzibah acknowledges that Phoebe is her superior in practical matters, she can't help retaining a sense of class superiority that she believes is unattainable to Phoebe. In every way that Hepzibah is aristocratic, Phoebe is solidly middle-class.

As if sensing Phoebe's presence, customers flow into the shop all day. Gingerbread sells out once again, thanks to little Ned Higgins. Uncle Venner praises the angelic character of Phoebe's work, and indeed there's "a spiritual quality" to it—even mundane tasks become lovely in her hands, as if they "bloom out of her character."

Phoebe's practical business sense appeals to others. Indeed, in everything she does, there's a sense that what one sees on the outside is what's on the inside, too—unlike Judge Pyncheon, for instance.

Later that day, Hepzibah gives Phoebe a tour of the **House** of the Seven Gables, showing her Colonel Pyncheon's **portrait** and the map of the fabled territory in Maine. She telling Phoebe about Alice Pyncheon, who died under mysterious circumstances and is now said to haunt the house, sometimes playing the harpsichord as she'd done during life.

Phoebe's status as a relative outsider to the Pyncheon family lets the reader identify with her innocence and curiosity in getting to know the House. It also means that she is untouched by the family's preoccupation with wealth and status.

Hepzibah also speaks of Holgrave and his strange, long-bearded friends, who include reformers, temperance lecturers, and other suspect characters. Yet he is a quiet and not unpleasant person, and she can't bring herself to send him away. Phoebe protests that he sounds "lawless," but Hepzibah has had reason to mistrust human law in her own life.

Holgrave, at least according to Hepzibah, is connected to radical social reform movements that were popular in the mid-19th century, but Hepzibah tolerates his strangeness because of her own sense of disconnection from mainstream society. Phoebe, however, is staunchly law-abiding and finds his radicalism alarming.

CHAPTER 6: MAULE'S WELL

After tea, Phoebe goes into the garden. She is surprised to see evidence that the garden has been tended—someone has been weeding and pruning the flowers and vegetables. There's also a fountain and an old coop, housing a pure but not very productive family of heirloom chickens.

The Pyncheon chickens are a humorous symbol of the family's own situation: an aristocratic bloodline in decline.

As Phoebe is befriending the chickens, Holgrave appears with a hoe in hand, surprising her. Phoebe introduces herself to the "lawless" **daguerreotypist**, who explains that tending the garden is his pastime. He offers to show Phoebe some of his professional work, arguing that while many daguerreotypes look unpleasant, it's only because their subjects really *are* unpleasant. Phoebe looks at the miniature he hands her, seeing the face of Colonel Pyncheon. Holgrave tells her that it's actually a modern face, Judge Pyncheon's—one which shows good humor in public, but whose photographed expression reflects the Colonel's cold, unmerciful character.

Holgrave argues that photographs generally tell the truth about their subjects, much as Colonel Pyncheon's portrait does. In Judge Pyncheon's case, a photograph can even reveal what that person's normal exterior does not. Unlike Phoebe, who expects things to be just what they seem, Holgrave seeks deeper layers of meaning in everything.

Phoebe is puzzled by Holgrave's unceremonious character—he seems both playful and grave—but she agrees to his offer to let her take over the tending of the flowers. Before retiring for the evening, Holgrave warns her not to drink from Maule's well, because its water is bewitched.

Holgrave's unpredictability unsettles the transparent Phoebe. Holgrave's apparent belief in the bewitched well is surprising given his generally rational outlook, suggesting that he has a specific interest in the story of the Maules and Pyncheons.

Inside, Phoebe finds Hepzibah sitting in the darkened parlor. As Phoebe lights a lamp for her, she thinks she hears a strange voice—more of an "unshaped sound" than spoken words. It seems unreal to her, and Hepzibah confirms that she didn't speak. When Phoebe, again suspecting she hears breathing in a corner, asks if there is anyone else in the room, Hepzibah just says that Phoebe must be tired and should go to bed. But in the night, Phoebe is sure that she hears halting footsteps on the stairs and the same strange, murmuring voice.

This scene is one of the Gothic horror elements in the novel—Phoebe perceives strange phenomena she cannot explain. Hawthorne sprinkles such details throughout the story in order to unsettle the reader's sense of what's real and to deepen the sense of melancholy surrounding the House and its inhabitants.

CHAPTER 7: THE GUEST

The next morning, Phoebe finds Hepzibah already in the kitchen. Hepzibah is staring at a cookbook, trying to find an idea for breakfast. Phoebe helps Hepzibah prepare a mackerel, some coffee, and a cake. With the addition of Hepzibah's family china and some flowers picked by Phoebe, the breakfast table is soon copiously laden. But there is a third place setting—who is it for?

Hepzibah isn't accustomed to being domestic, much less cooking elaborate meals, so the more practical Phoebe must come to her aid. Her motivation for such out-of-character behavior is finally about to be revealed.

Hepzibah, trembling and tearful, tells a puzzled Phoebe that her heart is overflowing. She murmurs about "poor Clifford." Phoebe hears the same hesitant step she had heard overnight and, at long last, Hepzibah opens the door and leads a stranger into the room: an elderly man with long, graying hair. His expression wavers like a flickering candle.

It's such a momentous day that Hepzibah's tender emotions finally overflow her reserved exterior—a reaction that is, again, out of character for the genteel Hepzibah. The footsteps Phoebe heard last night were Clifford's, yet the ghostly sense of tragedy surrounding Clifford persists.

Hepzibah introduces Phoebe and helps the man into a chair. He struggles to take in his surroundings. Watching him, Phoebe suddenly realizes that the man is the same delicate figure whom Hepzibah had shown her in the miniature **portrait**. Even the sense of a lingering calamity cannot totally erase the man's graceful beauty.

Clifford's ravaged exterior cannot completely erase the beauty that was transparently shown in his portrait, which Phoebe picks up on right away, suggesting a kindred sort of innocence that the two share.

As Hepzibah pours Clifford coffee, Clifford seems bewildered by Hepzibah's frowning expression. Hepzibah assures Clifford that she is not angry with him, and that there is only love here. As Clifford enjoys the food and begins to perk up, it's evident that he has good taste and an appreciation for beauty. It's also evident in the way he smiles at Phoebe's loveliness and recoils at Hepzibah's age. He delights in a crimson rose Phoebe has picked in the garden, but he cowers before the **portrait** of Colonel Pyncheon, asking Hepzibah to cover it. She promises to do so.

Like Phoebe, Clifford struggles to make sense of people who are not quite as they seem—even when it's just a matter of a scowl hiding a loving spirit. This makes it difficult for him to bond anew with his sister, whereas Phoebe's transparent beauty is attractive to him. It also makes the sight of Colonel Pyncheon's fierce portrait especially grating to his delicate sensibilities.

Clifford is rattled anew when the shop bell rings. Hepzibah explains that they are now poor and that she's found it necessary to open a shop to support the two of them. She asks Clifford if he is ashamed of her because of this. Clifford asks what further shame could possibly befall him, and he begins to weep. After a little while, he falls asleep. Hepzibah gazes sadly at his changed face.

In addition to the notable change in Hepzibah's appearance, Clifford also discovers that the household's class standing has shifted in his absence. Yet Clifford also alludes to a deeper shame, the real source of which has yet to be revealed.

CHAPTER 8: THE PYNCHEON OF TODAY

Phoebe finds Ned Higgins in the shop. Ned tells Phoebe that Clifford is Hepzibah's brother but doesn't explain where Clifford has been. As Ned leaves, a portly, well-dressed, cheerful-looking man enters. He greets Phoebe in flattering tones, bowing and smiling. When he realizes that Phoebe is a relative, he introduces himself as Judge Pyncheon. When he leans forward to offer a kiss of greeting, Phoebe instinctively draws back, blushing, which leaves Judge Pyncheon awkwardly kissing the air. When Phoebe looks up again, the Judge's mild expression has become hard and unyielding.

Phoebe's encounter with Judge Pyncheon is a good example of her innocent transparency versus his flattering, false exterior. The Judge's moods are startlingly changeable, suggesting that his true nature is never hidden far beneath the good-natured exterior. He is a startling contrast to the gentle Clifford.

Phoebe realizes that Judge Pyncheon is the subject of the miniature **daguerreotype** which Holgrave had shown her yesterday. She wonders if the hard expression is really the Judge's natural temperament—one that was passed down to him by Colonel Pyncheon. If so, it seems to be proof that the defects of one generation are passed down to the rest.

Seeing the Judge's momentary coldness, Phoebe quickly observes that Holgrave's claim about daguerreotypes was true—they really do capture a person's essence. She also perceives that the Judge's personality seems to be hereditary, instinctively picking up on the nature of the multigenerational Pyncheon curse.

When Phoebe looks again, however, Judge Pyncheon has resumed his sunny, benevolent mood. Phoebe stays reserved, unable to shake the feeling that Colonel Pyncheon has entered the shop after a quick stop at the barber's and a change into updated fashions.

To Phoebe, Judge Pyncheon seems to be the Colonel reincarnate. Her status as a distant cousin raised apart from the other Pyncheons, their character, and their outlook seems to give her special insight into their flaws.

Judge Pyncheon's reputation is as good as his venerable ancestor's, but public testimony isn't always as reliable as private. For example, traditions have circulated that both the Colonel and the Judge, for all their outward generosity, are guilty of greed. Both are rumored to have been heartbreakingly harsh toward their wives.

Just because a person's public reputation is sound, the narrator argues, doesn't mean that their inner character matches what they project outwardly. This seems to be especially the case with high-status figures like the Judge and the Colonel.

Phoebe hasn't heard these rumors and isn't very familiar with the Pyncheon family history. But she does know the story of Matthew Maule's curse and the story that blood could sometimes be heard gurgling in Pyncheon throats—so when she hears an odd noise in the Judge's throat, she startles. Judge Pyncheon supposes that her fear is because of the arrival of Clifford. Phoebe replies that Clifford is the gentlest man imaginable.

Phoebe isn't familiar with either the Judge's public reputation or the privately-circulated legends, but she knows the sign of the supposed curse when she hears it. The Judge tries to cast Clifford as being a dangerous man, which Phoebe already intuits as untrue.

When Phoebe tries to stop Judge Pyncheon from entering the house unannounced, he sets her aside, reminding her that *she* is the stranger here. He smiles warmly at Hepzibah, who, hearing him approach, blocks the doorway. He tells Hepzibah that he has come to see Clifford and offer him anything he might need—they can even come to live on his country estate so that he and Hepzibah might tend to Clifford together. A weak, frightened cry from the other room interrupts them—Clifford begs Hepzibah not to let the Judge enter. At the sound, the Judge's expression turns more darkly forbidding than ever. But he quickly corrects himself, resuming his warmth and promising to come back another time.

Judge Pyncheon shows that he has the ability to be forceful and intrusive when he wishes to be—and Hepzibah shows her fortitude in the face of his attempts to cajole her. Clifford obviously has a longstanding fear of the Judge. Although the Judge relents in his quest to see Clifford, there is definitely the sense that he will not be so acquiescent the next time.

After the Judge leaves, Hepzibah rests her head on Phoebe's shoulder, calling the Judge "the horror of [her] life." She sends Phoebe to calm and comfort Clifford. Phoebe does so, wondering whether judges and other such eminent men really can be other than what they seem. The thought is disturbing to her, and she sets it aside, figuring that Hepzibah's bitterness is due to a family feud.

Though supernatural horrors have been hinted at throughout the book so far, what horrifies Hepzibah the most is a human being. This suggests that, regardless of the fanciful details, people can do greater harm to one another than any curse can.

CHAPTER 9: CLIFFORD AND PHOEBE

For years, Hepzibah has looked forward to her present situation—of being able to care for her beloved brother Clifford, to whom she has remained unfalteringly faithful. She does everything she can think of to try to make him feel comfortable. She finds some volumes of fiction and poetry, but these don't appeal to Clifford, and Hepzibah's croaking efforts to read aloud don't help. In fact, Hepzibah's aged appearance and awkward manners inevitably distress the tasteful Clifford, and he averts his eyes from her.

In spite of her deep love for Clifford, Hepzibah struggles to connect with her brother after such a lengthy estrangement, showing that the effects of time are difficult to surmount—and that there are many sorrowful consequences of an imprisonment besides the jailtime itself.

Hepzibah turns to Phoebe, who quickly establishes herself as indispensable to both Clifford and Hepzibah. The house itself becomes brighter and more cheerful with her presence there, and her youthful wholesomeness softens Hepzibah's anxieties and Clifford's mournfulness. Phoebe's presence becomes especially important to Clifford, who becomes restless in her absence but is content when she sits by him, or even when he hears her singing throughout the house.

In contrast to Hepzibah's age, Phoebe's youth transforms both her environment and Clifford himself. She injects health, hope, and wholesomeness into the House—qualities that haven't been there for many years.

Clifford grows youthful as he spends more time with Phoebe—Phoebe's beauty and solidity draw him back into the world, creating a home around her and assuring Clifford that reality isn't a delusion. She is a symbol of all the things Clifford has missed out on in his life. Phoebe, for her part, simply perceives that Clifford needs care and affection, and she freely gives these things. The **House**'s atmosphere nevertheless takes a toll on Phoebe, making her more pensive as she wonders about Clifford's past. She and Hepzibah continue to take turns watching over Clifford and minding the shop.

Phoebe's company doesn't just comfort Clifford—he actually seems to grow younger because of her presence. This is not simply because Phoebe is young, but because her innocence helps anchor Clifford in concrete reality. However, the House cannot restore what Phoebe gives away—she doesn't know the full story about Clifford, and the mood of the House casts a shadow over her, too.

CHAPTER 10: THE PYNCHEON GARDEN

Clifford tends to spend all day drowsing in his chair, but Phoebe often coaxes him into the garden, where Uncle Venner and Holgrave have made repairs to the arbor, providing a shady place to sit. Phoebe reads to Clifford and talks to him about the garden blooms. Clifford grows childlike at the sight of hummingbirds that flock to the garden's blossoms. Hepzibah recalls that Clifford delighted in hummingbirds even as a baby. This remembrance always moves her to tears, comparing his present childlike happiness to his stolen past and uncertain future. They also enjoy watching the chickens—who, on Clifford's request, have been set free from their coop—and admiring the shifting sunlight reflecting in Maule's Well. However, sometimes Clifford becomes frightened, believing that he sees a "dark face" in the well.

Being outside the confines of the House itself, among living things, does its inhabitants good. Like Phoebe, flowers and hummingbirds possess a simplicity that delights Clifford and restores a sense of youth. However, there's a grief attached to this, since Clifford can never actually regain the years he lost in prison; he can be so fully healed. Clifford is more sensitive than most people to the House's haunted secrets as well.

After Phoebe goes to church on Sundays, she, Clifford, Hepzibah, Holgrave, and Uncle Venner gather in the Pyncheon garden. Clifford especially enjoys Uncle Venner's company because the latter, besides being cheerful, helps him feel comparatively youthful for a brief time. They all enjoy fresh garden-picked currants and conversation. Clifford grows especially animated and fanciful during these gatherings. As evening draws near, however, his mood generally darkens as he murmurs, "I want my happiness!"

Phoebe and the family friends create a kind of miniature society for Clifford which helps cheer him and further ground him in reality. However, despite a measure of genuine happiness, he inevitably pines for what he has lost.

CHAPTER 11: THE ARCHED WINDOW

Phoebe decides that it would be beneficial for Clifford to have some variation in his routine, so they sit together at a large, arched window on the second floor, overlooking the street. Clifford remains mostly obscured by a curtain while watching passersby. Things like omnibuses and trains seem strange to him, but he loves seeing the antiquated merchants' carts jingling down Pyncheon Street.

Though Clifford cannot fully rejoin society, Phoebe tries to help him regain a connection to it, if only as a spectator. The changes in technology over the past 30 years are apparent, giving a sense that progress is constant and unstoppable, heedless of individual human lives.

One day, an Italian boy with a barrel organ stops underneath the Pyncheon Elm and begins playing melodies. A monkey sits on his shoulder and, when the boy stops playing, jumps down to beg for coins from passersby. Clifford enjoys the performance but cries at the sight of the monkey, seeing a kind of symbolic ugliness in its greed.

Greed strikes Clifford as the ugliest of values, something that comes through more visibly in the monkey's begging than in the shrewdness with which humans often conceal such behavior.

Another day, a political parade passes by, and Clifford is so emotionally overwhelmed by the display that he puts his foot on the windowsill, as if to step outside. Phoebe and Hepzibah, terrified, hold him back. Even Clifford is unsure whether he was moved by some strange fear or by the desire to join the crowd. He seems to need a shock of some sort.

Clifford longs to rejoin society more fully and seems to sense that it has passed him by, rather like a parade. Despite Phoebe's and Hepzibah's best efforts, he feels as if he is helplessly stuck in time.

One Sunday morning, Clifford is moved by the sunshine, the sound of the church bells tolling across the city, and the sight of Phoebe walking off to church with a wave and a warm smile. He tells Hepzibah that if he were to go to church, he feels as if he could pray once again, surrounded by so many other souls. Seeing the look on his face, Hepzibah decides that they should go to church together, even though she herself has not gone for many years.

Clifford's longing to rejoin society manifests in his sudden desire to attend church again. At this time (the mid-19th century), church membership was a more prominent aspect of one's membership in civil society—whether out of sincerity (as for Phoebe) or out of the hypocrisy that Hawthorne often criticizes (like Judge Pyncheon).

Hepzibah and Clifford dress in their faded, moldy churchgoing clothes and head out the door. As soon as they cross the threshold, the warmth of the day seems to vanish, and they both feel exposed before the world. Clifford sadly observes that they are like ghosts who do not belong among other human beings; they do not have the right to go anywhere except for this cursed old **house**. They retreat back into the gloomy house.

Hepzibah and Clifford's decrepit clothing symbolizes their long estrangement from broader society; they realize this as soon as they venture out of the house. They belong to the House of the Seven Gables and nowhere else.

Clifford is not constantly gloomy, however. In some ways, he is like a child, not having to worry about the future or providing for his own needs. He dreams often of his boyhood and youth and somewhat lingers in these dreams throughout his days. Feeling so close to childhood himself, he loves watching children out the window, and one day he is inspired to stand at the window blowing soap-bubbles as he'd once loved doing. Many people stop to watch, including Judge Pyncheon, who happens to be passing by. He sarcastically says, "Aha, Cousin Clifford! [...] Still blowing soap bubbles!" Seeing him, Clifford is overcome with dread.

Clifford's innocence contrasts with Judge Pyncheon's jovial yet vaguely threatening words. His simple enjoyment makes him a spectacle to onlookers—and, because this behavior makes him look insane, it could potentially be used against him.

CHAPTER 12: THE DAGUERREOTYPIST

Clifford goes to bed early like a child, leaving Phoebe to do as she likes for the evening. She often goes for walks, or shopping, or to a lecture. Still, Phoebe grows a bit quieter in the atmosphere of the **House**, and her eyes grow darker and deeper.

The atmosphere of the House is taking a toll on Phoebe, even though she remains innocent and pure. It cannot restore the light she pours into the House and its people.

Phoebe's only youthful companion is the **daguerreotypist**, Holgrave. They don't have much in common, and under other circumstances, they might not have been much interested in each other. Phoebe begins to learn something of Holgrave's history. He is poorly educated and became independent at a young age; now, at only 22, he has worked as a schoolteacher, salesman, editor, and dentist, and he has traveled abroad. He also claims to be a skilled Mesmerist, which he demonstrates by putting one of the chickens to sleep.

Mesmerism, also known as "animal magnetism," was a practice of hypnosis that became popular in the late 18th century and persisted into the 19th. Though plenty dismissed it as quackery (as Hawthorne did), others embraced it as a tool of healing. It's not yet clear whether Hawthorne uses it as an innocent tool or a manipulative one.

Being a **daguerreotypist**, too, is unlikely to be a permanent phase in Holgrave's life, eventually to be cast aside. Phoebe instinctively trusts Holgrave because of his sense of confidence regarding his inner being, yet she's also unsettled by his "lack of reverence for what was fixed" in the world around him.

Phoebe has traditional expectations about the world around her and finds Holgrave's irreverence—for instance, his unconcern about choosing a stable career path—unsettling.

Holgrave also strikes Phoebe as cool and detached—well-meaning, yet without deep affection. Because of this, she can't figure out why Holgrave is interested in her and the rest of the Pyncheon household. Holgrave often inquires about Clifford's wellbeing, explaining to Phoebe that Clifford doesn't mean anything to him personally, but that it is such a bewildering world, and that people are riddles to mere observers like himself.

Phoebe pours her heart into the people around her, so it's difficult for her to understand Holgrave's more clinical, journalistic interests in the affairs of the Pyncheons.

Holgrave is a fairly optimistic person. A young man, he looks upon the world, too, as young and changeable, capable of being transformed into everything it ought to be. He believes that society is on the cusp of a golden age. The narrator expresses hope that Holgrave's optimism will remain pure and settled in his character, so that when age and experience inevitably erode his faith in progress, he won't undergo a radical shift in character.

Holgrave has a firm belief in progress; he sees the world as a reflection of his own youth and optimism. The narrator suggests that such an outlook doesn't typically survive with age and experience.

One particular afternoon, Holgrave sits with Phoebe in the garden. Holgrave, despite his characteristic detachment, has warmed to Phoebe, and today he talks enthusiastically of his hopes and dreams. When Phoebe asks Holgrave why he began boarding with the Pyncheons, he begins discoursing about "the Past." People today, he argues, are far too dependent on the ideas and patterns of generations dead and gone. He even suggests that it would be better if **houses**, public buildings, and churches weren't built out of brick or stone—then, their crumbling would prompt each generation to reform the institutions contained therein.

Holgrave sees houses as symbols of people's irrational attachment to the things of the past—the past being the enemy of progress. If people weren't so attached to edifices, he believes, they would be more critical of their ideals and more open to reform and progress. For him, the Pyncheons and the House of the Seven Gables are a case study for this theory.

Holgrave points out that the atmosphere in the **House** of the Seven Gables isn't wholesome, either. Annoyed, Phoebe asks why he chooses to live there. He explains that he is its student—if the house symbolizes "that odious and abominable Past," then he will study its ways so as to "know the better how to hate it."

Holgrave is forthright about his loathing for what the House of the Seven Gables represents to him, whereas for Phoebe, it is simply the home of those she loves.

Phoebe is surprised that Holgrave believes the story of Maule's curse on her Pyncheon ancestor. Holgrave believes the story is factual, not superstitious, and that it's an example of a theory. The **House**, he claims, symbolizes Colonel Pyncheon's "inordinate desire to plant [...] a family." Holgrave believes that such a desire is the root of most human wrong. Instead, he says, in every century, families should merge with the mass of humanity, disregarding ancestry.

Holgrave elaborates on his feelings about the House of the Seven Gables with reference to its history. He believes that the House is a symbol of the Pyncheon family's foundational sin, as it were: their greed. This greed is a common human failing. He believes that family dynasties are the root of many problems and should be allowed to die off.

Holgrave adds that Colonel Pyncheon appears to have "perpetuated himself" in the subject of Holgrave's **daguerreotype**, Judge Pyncheon. Phoebe is startled by Holgrave's passion. He admits that the topic has seized him "with the strangest tenacity of clutch" since moving into the **House**. To cope with that, he has written an episode from Pyncheon history into a fictionalized form, which he hopes to publish in a magazine. With Phoebe's permission, he begins to read it aloud.

Holgrave believes that the daguerreotype image of Judge Pyncheon captures the family's sin of greed in a raw form—the Judge's shocking resemblance to the Colonel shows the 200-year-old effort to perpetuate the Pyncheons in action. It also captures the Pyncheons' worst traits, like coldness of character.

CHAPTER 13: ALICE PYNCHEON

One day, 37 years after Colonel Pyncheon's death, Gervayse Pyncheon's black slave, Scipio, brings a message to the carpenter, Matthew Maule, grandson of the executed Maule. Gervayse Pyncheon has summoned Maule to the **House** of the Seven Gables. Scipio mentions that Colonel Pyncheon haunts the house and frightens him. Maule mutters that, no matter what the Colonel's ghost does, his grandfather "will be pretty sure to stick it to the Pyncheons" as long as the House remains. He agrees to come to the House and passes along his greetings to young Alice Pyncheon, recently returned from Italy.

This chapter includes a flashback in the form of Holgrave's magazine article. Holgrave's authorship of the story gives some distance from the Gothic horror elements about to be portrayed, allowing the reader to decide whether they are historically accurate or not. This story-within-a-story is set a couple of generations after Colonel Pyncheon and Matthew Maule, with their respective grandsons, Gervayse and Matthew the carpenter.

Matthew Maule the carpenter is not well liked. His grandfather is believed to haunt the **House** of the Seven Gables, insisting he's the property's rightful tenant, and that he will torment the Pyncheons indefinitely unless the situation is rectified. Now, his grandson, too, is surrounded by rumors. He allegedly has the ability to haunt people's dreams and read minds, and he's said to have the Evil Eye. He's also generally unpleasant, and he isn't a church member.

The witchcraft allegations associated with the original Matthew Maule continue to swirl around the family, with rumors of other supernatural abilities attributed to the younger Matthew. Matthew's lack of church membership would have been seen as both religiously and socially suspect.

Gervayse Pyncheon is the grandson of Colonel Pyncheon—he's the little boy who'd discovered the man's dead body. Though Gervayse has never loved the **House** since that time and even spent some years in Europe, the House is now bustling with his large family. When Matthew Maule the carpenter arrives there, he pridefully and bitterly approaches the front door instead of the back or side entrance.

The events of his boyhood were traumatic for Gervayse and have forever colored his attitude toward the House he inherited, but he is unable to escape its pull. Matthew, too, retains his grandfather's pride, shown in his disregard for class protocol.

When the carpenter is admitted, he hears a sad melody: Alice Pyncheon is playing the harpsichord. Scipio ushers Maule into Gervayse Pyncheon's parlor. The room is richly furnished in European fashions. Two things stand out: the map of the old Pyncheon territory in Maine and Colonel Pyncheon's **portrait**. Mr. Pyncheon drinks coffee in front of the fire and only vaguely acknowledges Maule's entrance.

Though the furnishings have changed, in other ways the parlor is unchanged from the Colonel's day. The presence of the old family territory, its promised fortune, and of course the inescapable memory of the Colonel himself loom over the family's life.

Matthew Maule the carpenter, however, boldly steps to the fire and looks Gervayse Pyncheon in the face, demanding to know Pyncheon's business with him. He identifies himself as Matthew Maule's grandson. Pyncheon sets this "grudge" aside. However, he has a question for Maule about the Pyncheons' territorial claim. He believes that Colonel Pyncheon possessed a deed to this land which has since disappeared.

Gervayse assumes that the bad blood between the Pyncheons and the Maules can be simply laid aside—a reminder that, as the more powerful family, they have the luxury of disregarding such things. The Maules don't have the luxury of forgetting the rumors and loss of status that surround them.

There have long been rumors that the disappeared deed has some connection to the Maule family. A superstitious legend even led to the searching of Matthew Maule's grave—where, mysteriously, the skeleton's right hand was found to be missing. Gervayse himself remembers being a small boy and seeing papers spread out on Colonel Pyncheon's table the day before he died. That same day, the present carpenter's father, Thomas, had been performing some task in the room. He offers to pay Matthew if the latter has any information on the deed's whereabouts. Maule refuses him at first, but then he asks whether his grandfather's land, and indeed the **House** of the Seven Gables, might be made over to him if he can provide the evidence being sought.

One of the rumors associated with Colonel Pyncheon's death was that someone claimed to have seen a skeleton hand at his throat when he died. The absence of the deceased Matthew Maule's hand, then, suggests that he was perhaps supernaturally involved in the Colonel's death. Gervayse accuses Matthew the carpenter's father of stealing the family deed on the basis of his childhood memories, and Matthew senses an opportunity.

Legend relates that, at this point, Colonel Pyncheon's **portrait** began to behave strangely. During this conversation between the carpenter and Gervayse Pyncheon, the figure in the portrait has been frowning and shaking its fist, while the two men remain oblivious. When Maule suggested the transfer of the property, the portrait figure looked as if it was about to climb out of its frame.

The legend of the Colonel's portrait coming to life is one of the major Gothic elements in the book. Again, its position within Holgrave's magazine article allows room for doubt—is Holgrave taking liberty with the facts, or did this really happen? Either way, it conveys the point that a transfer of the Pyncheon property would enrage the Colonel.

Gervayse Pyncheon is surprisingly open to the carpenter's terms. He's not attached to the **House** and would prefer to return to Europe—something the recovered Eastern territory would make easier. So he tells Maule that if Maule can produce the requisite document, then the House of the Seven Gables will be his. Legend has it that the men then drew up an agreement and drank wine together. Thinking he notices a frown on the **portrait**'s face, Gervayse concludes that the wine is too potent for him.

Ironically, Gervayse's desire to rid himself of the House is about to tie him more deeply to the family curse, because doing so is dependent upon acquiring the elusive Eastern lands. Gervayse notices something odd about the Colonel's portrait, but he brushes it off as the effect of his drink, adding additional uncertainty and suspense to the story.

Maule the carpenter then explains that if Gervayse wishes to recover the lost document, he must allow Maule to talk with Alice. Gervayse is appalled and baffled at Maule's motives, but somehow, Maule persuades him to summon his daughter. Alice Pyncheon is stately and reserved, yet possesses a certain innocent tenderness. When she enters the parlor, she looks approvingly at Maule's strong figure, but Maule interprets this as a prideful glance and never forgives her.

Alice is a classic maiden figure, a staple of Gothic horror, innocently brought into the middle of a situation of horror. Gervayse's willingness to bring Alice into it suggests that his desire for wealth runs deep enough for him to risk his own daughter. Maule is only able to look at the Pyncheons through a lens of pride, showing that the ancestral curse has a corrupting effect on him, too.

With confusion, Gervayse Pyncheon explains that Maule the carpenter has some business with Alice, because Alice's help is supposedly required in recovering the important document. He promises he will stay nearby and that Alice can call off Maule's inquiries at any time. Maule has Alice sit in a chair and instructs her to look in his eyes. She complies. When Pyncheon next looks at them, he sees Maule making a slow, downward gesture toward Alice. He commands Maule to stop, but Alice wants to continue. Pyncheon turns away again, reasoning that it's partly for Alice's sake that he's letting this go forward—with a rich dowry, after all, she can marry well. And besides, Alice's purity will safeguard her against any questionable doings on Maule's part.

Maule appears to be hypnotizing Alice (note that Holgrave himself has a personal interest in the 19th-century mesmerism craze). Gervayse justifies these proceedings to himself, suggesting that he has a guilty conscience about the way he's chosen to involve his innocent daughter in his pursuit of wealth. This supports Hawthorne's argument that the unchecked pursuit of wealth has a corrupting effect on people.

Moments later, Gervayse hears an indistinct murmur from his daughter, but he doesn't turn. Finally, the carpenter says, "Behold your daughter!" Pyncheon sees Maule pointing triumphantly at Alice, who sits as if asleep. When Pyncheon calls her name in terror, even kisses and roughly shakes her, he only perceives a vast distance between himself and his unconscious daughter. He shakes his fist at Maule. Maule says that it's Pyncheon's fault for selling his daughter for the sake of a piece of parchment.

Gervayse refrains from interfering even though he senses that Alice needs help. When he sees that Alice is thoroughly under Maule's spell, he is horrified, beginning to perceive the depth of the wrong he's committed. Maule states what Gervayse suspected: that he sacrificed his daughter for the sake of his own greed.

Maule the carpenter then beckons to Alice, and she rises and moves toward him. Maule triumphantly declares that she is now his. Legend has it that Maule then used Alice as a kind of medium to speak to her Pyncheon ancestors. Alice is said to have described seeing Colonel Pyncheon, Matthew Maule, and Maule's son Thomas, all of whom had knowledge of the missing deed. The ghostly Pyncheon looked as if he meant to reveal the location of the deed, and then he was forcibly restrained by the ghostly Maules. After learning this, the present-day Maule turns to Gervayse and says that the secret of the deed "makes part of your grandfather's retribution" which the family cannot get rid of.

Alice is completely under Maule's sway. Using a hypnotized person as a medium to speak to the dead was one form that mesmerism was believed to take. Alice revisits one of the significant moments in the history of both families. Holgrave's interpretation of this supernatural event is that the deed for the Maine territory has been hidden for a reason, as if the Pyncheons' insatiable desire for more wealth is meant to haunt them indefinitely, forcing them to face the corrupting effects of their greed in one generation after another.

At this, Gervayse Pyncheon gurgles with rage, and Maule the carpenter jeers about the old curse. He leaves, but he promises that Alice, upon waking, will have reason to remember him. Indeed, it turns out that Alice has been "martyred" by her father's "inordinate desire for measuring his land by miles instead of acres." She is Maule's slave from this time forward. From afar, Maule can make her laugh, cry, or dance a jig, no matter whether she is in church, entertaining guests, or at a funeral.

Gervayse's gurgle recalls the original Maule's curse that God would give the Pyncheons blood to drink. But in this case, it doesn't mean that Gervayse will die prematurely—instead, he has to watch his daughter be humiliatingly subject to the carpenter's will, her innocence corrupted. With the remark about "miles instead of inches," Maule shows how petty the desire for wealth can be.

Some time later, Alice goes to a bridal party—the daughter of a laborer, whom Maule the carpenter is about to marry. Humbly, Alice waits upon and kisses Maule's bride. After she walks home in a mix of snow and rain, she soon falls deathly ill. But before she dies, she plays joyful music on the harpsichord, knowing she's about to be set free from her humiliation. Matthew Maule attends her funeral in anguish—he'd only meant to toy with Alice, not to kill her.

Tellingly, Alice seems not only to retain her innocence after Maule's intrusion into her mind, but her own will seems to become purer than ever. This suggests that true innocence really does overpower horror and evil in the end, even if only in death. Maule, meanwhile, actually gets no joy from his actions, suggesting that pride is the Maules' besetting fault as greed is for the Pyncheons.

CHAPTER 14: PHOEBE'S GOOD-BY

When Holgrave finishes reading the story, he discovers that, in response to his gesticulations, Phoebe has fallen into a drowsy state. He realizes that if he chose, he could attain mastery over Phoebe's spirit much as Maule the carpenter did over Alice's. But he forbids himself this temptation, waking her with a slight gesture and joking about the dullness of his tale. Phoebe denies having been asleep and can't remember the particulars of the story.

Holgrave shows that he's different from Matthew Maule—when he realizes he could control Phoebe, he chooses instead to avoid the temptation by waking her up. Holgrave has a mysteriously strong power of mesmerism, but the narrator suggests that the power itself isn't evil—rather, people's choices about how they use that power might be.

By this time, evening is falling, giving both the **House** and garden a romantic aspect that touches even Holgrave's heart, renewing his feeling of youth. He says he has seldom felt happier than he does right now. Phoebe admits that she is no longer as merry as she used to be. Since she came to live with Clifford and Hepzibah, her spirits are no longer light, and she feels she has aged.

The House of the Seven Gables has a dark pull on those who live there. It's fed Holgrave's obsessions with his theories, as his short story about Alice Pyncheon showed; it also has a dampening effect even on Phoebe's youthful spirits.

Holgrave argues that Phoebe has not lost anything that was worth keeping. He says that one's first youth is of limited value. However, a "second youth" sometimes comes in response to some deeper joy, like falling in love, and this youth is much profounder. Phoebe doesn't understand.

Holgrave suggests that youth is often deceptively shallow. In response to life experiences, it develops into something deeper and stronger. In other words, aging and other forms of change aren't linear, straightforward processes.

Phoebe explains that he is returning to the country for a few days in order to settle some arrangements and say a proper good-bye to her friends. She considers the **House** of the Seven Gables to be her real home, and she enjoys being useful here. Holgrave agrees that Phoebe is the source of all health and comfort within the house; when she leaves, it will vanish.

Holgrave predicts that because Phoebe is the invigorating force within the house, it will once again be subject to darkness and decay after she leaves.

Hepzibah and Clifford, Holgrave says, only appear to be alive. However, his interest in them is more analytical than compassionate: he also perceives that their family drama is drawing to an end. Phoebe is distressed by this—it seems to her that for Holgrave, her relatives' sufferings are like a play performed for his amusement. Holgrave feels the truth of her words. He also tells Phoebe that he has an inherited mystic tendency, but he doesn't actually know what will befall her family. He does, however, have a morbid suspicion of Judge Pyncheon. He hears Maule's well murmuring strangely.

Holgrave has the attitude of a journalistic observer toward Phoebe's family, which contrasts with her heartfelt concern. His detachment offends her, and he himself also feels that his approach isn't quite as it should be. He also hints again at his inherited "mysticism" and seems to have a connection to the murmurings of the place itself despite not being part of the Pyncheon family.

Two days later, Phoebe tearfully says goodbye to Hepzibah and Clifford. Within just a few weeks, the **House** of the Seven Gables has become dearest of all places to her, and Hepzibah and Clifford, in their strange ways, have won her love. Sadly, Hepzibah observes that Phoebe's smile is now sometimes forced. Clifford looks into Phoebe's eyes and says that she has passed from girlhood into womanhood. Phoebe also bids goodbye to Ned Higgins, who stops by for gingerbread, and Uncle Venner, who calls her an "angel" whom the old Pyncheons cannot live without.

Phoebe's genuine love for the House of the Seven Gables and its people shows how strong and pure her innocence is—it withstands and changes the decaying effects of the House. However, the House has also taken a toll on her within just a few weeks.

CHAPTER 15: THE SCOWL AND SMILE

In Phoebe's absence, things at the **House** of the Seven Gables are dreary: a storm sets in, and Clifford is joyless. Meanwhile, business in the shop declines, since customers have heard that Hepzibah is minding the store. Hepzibah's best efforts to enliven the House fall short. By the fifth day of the storm, Clifford refuses to leave his bed.

Just as Holgrave predicted, Phoebe's departure robs the House of the Seven Gables of its light. The storm (a common characteristic of Gothic literature) adds to this stark change of atmosphere.

Later that morning, however, Hepzibah hears brief music coming from Alice Pyncheon's harpsichord—Clifford had practiced the instrument in his youth. The notes are cut short by the jingling of the shop bell, and a heavy footstep is heard—as well as a gurgling sound. Hepzibah, scowling, goes to the shop and finds Judge Pyncheon, as she'd expected.

Clifford struggles to stir himself, again returning to bits and pieces of his long-ago youth. The dissonance of the shop bell symbolizes Judge Pyncheon's discordant presence, which prompts a genuine frown from Hepzibah.

Judge Pyncheon asks after Clifford while smiling brightly. He suggests that company would do Clifford good. Hepzibah defers him, explaining that Clifford is in bed and that the Judge's presence can only do him harm. In a tearful soliloquy, the Judge asks how long Hepzibah's "unchristian" bitterness against him will persist. Hepzibah is furious and speaks in anger for the first time, urging the Judge to give up the pretense of harboring anything but hatred for Clifford.

Judge Pyncheon's smile conceals his true intentions. So do his manipulative tears, as he blames Hepzibah for the fruit of his own behavior. Hepzibah, in turn, shows that she is capable of boldly standing up to the Judge's hypocrisy.

The Judge is an eminent figure in his community, as everybody acknowledges. In fact, even the Judge himself does not doubt that his reputation is just. Yet Hepzibah's lone dislike should not be too quickly dismissed—evil might lurk too deeply in the Judge's heart for he himself to recognize.

Eminence and good public reputation, the narrator suggests, do not always tell the whole truth—nor should the opinions of less "important" people be dismissed, even if they are decidedly in the minority.

Strong-minded men of forceful character often fall into this trap. Such men usually see outward forms as the most important thing. They are preoccupied with things like wealth, property, and public regard. Because of this, such men are able to build up "a tall and stately edifice" (or **house**) which they see as equivalent to their own character. Thus, inevitably, such men picture their character as a palace. But beneath the marble floors of such a palace, there might lurk a decaying corpse which the palace's occupant can no longer smell, but whose scent pervades the entire place. Only the rare, gifted person can discern such rot, because the occupant constantly scatters rich smells around him, and visitors bring incense to burn before him.

The narrator suggests that eminent public figures tend to become alienated from the reality of their own character because they focus on outward things that support their status. In other words, someone like the Judge focuses on his property and public role and begins to equate those things with his own inner character. He might even do this to such an extent that he suppresses and forgets something rotten in his own character. Other people, interested in what they can gain from him, also suppress the truth through their own praise and flattery of him. It takes somebody rare—like Hepzibah—to cut through the outward pretensions and perceive the truth.

There is enough "splendid rubbish" in the Judge's life to deceive his own conscience. He is a good judge, public servant, and philanthropist, giving generously to various causes. He is morally pristine, casting off a dissolute son and denying him forgiveness until his deathbed. He is externally elegant and scrupulously polite to rich and poor alike. This "admirably arranged life" is what the Judge sees when he looks in the mirror.

The Judge has done so many outwardly good things that it's easy for him to forget what lurks deep in his conscience. Everything he does is meant to uphold his impeccable reputation and status in the eyes of the world. As a result, the carefully-maintained externalities are all he can perceive when he looks at himself.

Even if, in his long-ago youth, the Judge had committed a single wrong act—or perhaps other ones here and there throughout his life—can these really outweigh all the good he's done? The narrator observes that "this scale-and-balance system is a favorite" of those like Judge Pyncheon.

The Judge has become adept at justifying wrongdoing by setting it against the good and deciding that his good qualities outweigh the bad. The narrator suggests that the powerful often use this tactic to assure themselves that their reputation is deserved.

Hepzibah, meanwhile, is shocked at having said what she has been thinking for 30 years. Hearing it, Judge Pyncheon's mild expression turns dark and stern, looking for all the world like Colonel Pyncheon. He tells Hepzibah that he was responsible for Clifford's release from prison, and it is up to him to decide if Clifford should retain his freedom. He explains that he believes Clifford knows how the vast majority of Uncle Jaffrey's fortune can be recovered. He must speak to Clifford in order to find out.

Now that Hepzibah has spoken openly what she's been concealing, the Judge's façade drops away, too. His claim about Clifford's supposed knowledge echoes the earlier scene between Alice Pyncheon and Maule, implying that such an encounter would be ruinous for Clifford as Maule's interrogation was for Alice.

Hepzibah mocks such an idea, but the Judge insists that before Jaffrey's death, Clifford taunted him with the claim of secret knowledge of great wealth. He has also been watching Clifford's behavior closely, he explains, ever since his release. In particular, he saw Clifford's attempt to fling himself through the arched window. He can testify, therefore, that Clifford should not remain at large and ought to be committed to an asylum. If Clifford refuses to reveal the evidence of the fortune, then the Judge will take this as a final piece of evidence needed to commit Clifford.

The Judge has tremendous power over the more vulnerable Pyncheons. No matter whether Clifford cooperates with him or not, the Judge has the ability to manipulate and possibly ruin their lives. The claim about Clifford's knowledge—on the basis of something vaguely remembered from youth—shows how desperate he is for additional wealth.

Hepzibah tries to reason with Judge Pyncheon. He is old and already possesses great wealth—what more could he need? With his "hard and grasping spirit," he is just doing what Colonel Pyncheon did before him, perpetuating the curse. But she agrees to summon Clifford, fearing that this encounter will indeed drive her brother mad. While Judge Pyncheon waits, he throws himself wearily into the Colonel's chair. On the threshold, Hepzibah thinks she hears him speak, but the Judge gruffly denies it, hurrying his cousin on her way. He holds his pocket watch in his hand.

Hepzibah shows her perceptive nature once again—she clearly sees the nature of the Pyncheon spirit and the damage it causes to everyone it touches. But she is powerless and has no choice but to do as the Judge asks. Meanwhile, the ghostly voice that's heard signals something ominous.

CHAPTER 16: CLIFFORD'S CHAMBER

With trepidation, Hepzibah makes her way toward Clifford's chamber, the **House** feeling ghostlier than ever. The stories of Pyncheon history run through her mind, seeming like one catastrophe after another, and she has the foreboding sense that she, Clifford, and the Judge are about to add to it. She pauses by the arched window and watches life on Pyncheon Street carrying on as normal; she longs for just a moment of human companionship.

The weight of centuries of the Pyncheon curse seems to hover over Hepzibah, and she feels helplessly caught up in its unfolding. She is so subservient to fate that she feels cut off from ordinary society, much as her brother has always felt.

Hepzibah believes that the coming encounter between the Judge and Clifford will lead to the latter's ruin, due to his delicate nature. Men with the Judge's iron character can only with tremendous difficulty be persuaded out of false opinions; Clifford will unavoidably die. If he ever claimed to have knowledge of some great fortune, she is certain it was mere fantasy.

Hepzibah knows her brother's innocent nature can't withstand the force of horror or the power of the Judge's view of the world. Because Clifford has nothing of the Pyncheon greed in his character, he is vulnerable to the worst of the Judge's character.

Hepzibah thinks how strange it is to feel so helpless with a bustling world around her. Yet if she cried for help, people would run to help the stronger party—Judge Pyncheon has a magnetic attraction, causing even Hepzibah to momentarily question her doubts about his integrity. Clifford, by contrast, is just a vaguely-remembered figure of shame to most people.

Hepzibah considers the corrupting nature of status and power. Because Judge Pyncheon is so prominent and respected, people will naturally assume he is right and flock to his defense. But she and Clifford have little status, so they will be disregarded at best.

Hepzibah decides to seek out Holgrave for help, but he is in his public studio, not in his chambers. She glances at one of the **daguerreotypes** lying on the table, and "fate [stares] her in the face": it's Judge Pyncheon. Hepzibah has never felt more alone. She tries to pray but fears she is unheard.

Holgrave's daguerreotype plainly displays the truth of Hepzibah's and Clifford's seemingly hopeless fate at the hands of Judge Pyncheon.

At last, Hepzibah creeps to Clifford's chamber door and knocks. There is no reply. She knocks several more times, calling his name. Thinking that he's sound asleep, Hepzibah finally enters and discovers that the chamber is empty. Neither is Clifford in the garden below—there's only a strange-looking cat, at which Hepzibah feels compelled to throw a stick.

The cat is described in the novel as a "grimalkin," an archaic term for a cat. Grimalkins were traditionally associated with witchcraft, or with the devil seeking a soul. Thus, the appearance of this animal could be interpreted as a kind of dark omen.

Hepzibah is terrified. She pictures Clifford wandering the streets of town, subject to ridicule—or worse, wandering down to the docks and deciding to end his misery by jumping into the sea. She runs downstairs, calling to the Judge for help. But when she enters the darkened parlor, she finds the Judge sitting in the same position she left him in. She screams at him again.

Hepzibah is so desperate to find Clifford that she's even willing to ask for the Judge's help, but he is strangely unmoved by the situation.

Suddenly, Clifford himself appears on the threshold. He is deadly pale and wears a wild, scornful expression. He is pointing at something, and Hepzibah fears he has already gone mad. She urges him to be still. Clifford begins to laugh—"we can dance now," he tells her, "sing, laugh [...] The weight is gone, Hepzibah!" Hepzibah pushes past him and looks at the Judge, then gives a cry of horror. "What is to become of us?" she asks.

Clifford appears in a frighteningly lucid, purposeful mood compared to his previous appearance. Hepzibah realizes that Judge Pyncheon is dead. Clifford sees this as a joyful liberation, whereas Hepzibah senses that it could be their undoing.

Clifford tells Hepzibah that they must leave. Hepzibah sees that Clifford is wearing a cloak. Hepzibah is so frightened and baffled that any purpose is a relief to her, so she yields to Clifford's newfound resolve. At Clifford's urging, she gathers a cloak and purse, feeling as if she is in a dream and will surely wake up at any moment. She follows Clifford out of the **House** of the Seven Gables.

A reversal has occurred; Hepzibah, until now Clifford's caretaker for even the most basic of things, now helplessly follows him. Clifford uncharacteristically appears to have a plan. Judge Pyncheon's death seems to have been the sudden shock Clifford needs.

CHAPTER 17: THE FLIGHT OF TWO OWLS

Shivering and feeling adrift, Hepzibah follows Clifford toward the center of town. Clifford, she sees, is excited, almost drunkenly so, and he moves with purpose. They attract little notice as they walk through the wet, muddy, almost deserted town. Yet the sense of unreality doesn't change for Hepzibah, who keeps asking herself, "Am I awake?"

Outside of the House of the Seven Gables for the first time in the novel, the Pyncheons wander in a world that, up till now, has had no clear place for them. But such unaccustomed freedom feels threatening and unreal to Hepzibah.

Finally, Clifford leads them through the arched entrance of a large gray building. A train is puffing on the track, almost ready for departure. Clifford guides Hepzibah into one of the cars, and moments later, the train pulls away, drawing the two of them "into the great current of human life," from which they've been separated for so long. Hepzibah asks Clifford if all that has happened is a dream. He replies, "On the contrary, I have never been awake before!"

Clifford has a plan. He believes that the train—a symbol of technological progress that didn't exist in his youth, and which frightened him before—will be the means of their liberation. Abruptly, he and Hepzibah are thrust into the very center of human society and progress. Hepzibah feels disoriented, but Clifford feels newly alive.

The train contains about 50 other passengers, which in and of itself is a novelty for the two. The passengers' quiet occupations, many of them reading novels or papers, contrast with the noise of the train. Children toss a ball back and forth across the aisle. People get on and off the train at brief stops. Some sleep. The atmosphere is, in short, "life itself." Clifford sees that Hepzibah is feeling bemused by her surroundings and urges her to set aside the past and be happy.

The Pyncheon siblings have been isolated from society for such a long time that the activity on the train is like a microcosm of life itself. It's too much for Hepzibah, but for Clifford, it feels like an escape from what has entrapped him for most of his life.

Hepzibah, for her part, cannot focus on her changing surroundings. In her mind, the **House** of the Seven Gables looms everywhere, seeming to set itself down wherever she looks. Her mind, unlike Clifford's, is "unmalleable." Because of that, in this environment, she no longer feels like Clifford's guardian. Clifford, by contrast, seems to have been "startled into manhood," or at least something resembling it.

The House of the Seven Gables isn't just a dwelling; it's a state of mind that haunts Hepzibah wherever she happens to be. Within the House's confines, Hepzibah knows her role. On the train, she doesn't know how to relate to Clifford, who has transformed into someone different.

After the conductor passes through, Clifford gets into a conversation with an old man across the aisle, who says that Clifford has chosen a strange day for a pleasure-trip; surely their own hearth would be more comfortable. Clifford disagrees. He thinks that the railroad will eventually do away with "those stale ideas of home and fireside." A nomadic existence is better. Human progress, he claims, runs in a circle, or a spiral. When humanity thinks they have arrived at something new, they have, in fact, returned to something old and abandoned, yet spiritualized and perfected.

Clifford articulates a novel form of human progress—one that's even more radical than Holgrave's. He argues that the railroad is a sort of spiritualized form of travel which makes houses obsolete. It's a sort of reincarnation of an older, nomadic form of existence. Unlike Holgrave, who sees the past as irredeemable, Clifford sees it as a basis for progress, but one that will be transcended.

The "spiral" of progress, Clifford explains, transcends the ancient style of nomadic life. The railroads eliminate the weary effort of travel, making travel spiritual and eliminating the need to linger anywhere. There's longer any need to build homes. Clifford glows youthfully at the prospect. He adds that **houses** actually hinder human happiness. Souls need change; a stagnant old house becomes "unwholesome" to those within. He darkly recalls the House of the Seven Gables—it gives him a vision of a dead old man sitting in a chair and polluting the whole place. He could never be happy there, he continues. The old man begins to eye Clifford warily.

As Clifford expounds on his idea of progress, he begins to speak more literally about the House of the Seven Gables. He sees houses as symbolic of human stagnation; this, inevitably, leads him to think of the specific house from which he has fled. In Clifford's ecstatic mood, it's unclear whether he thinks that the scene with Judge Pyncheon was a dream or something that really just happened. Dream and reality are mixed in his mind.

Clifford exults that the farther he gets from the **House**, the younger he becomes. But now, his external age "belies [him] strangely," for he now feels youthful, as if his best days lie ahead. Ignoring Hepzibah's attempts to hush him, he continues chatting to the old man about a future in which homes, and indeed real estate, have vanished, taking away the misery that haunts the posterity of those who built them. Perhaps mesmerism and electricity will have similarly transforming effects.

Clifford feels he is aging in reverse as he gains distance from the imprisoning, unwholesome effects of the House. He perceives that the problem with houses is that they allow greed and wealth to exert unhealthy power over the lives of their founders' posterity. Thus, houses are a phenomenon that society should leave behind as outdated.

The old man points out that telegraphs have the advantage of helping to catch murderers. Clifford says that murderers have their rights, too, and maybe even excusable motives. He returns to the scene of the dead man sitting in the **House**—if another man fled that scene by train, wouldn't his rights be infringed if he arrived in a distant town and found everyone talking about the murder? At this point, the old man is eyeing Clifford with great suspicion. Clifford tells Hepzibah they have gone far enough and should exit at the next station.

The conversation continues to become a bit too literal, as the man's reference to catching murderers using telegraphs reminds Clifford that he is on the run. He observes that technology can have ambivalent effects, too—like making rapid communication possible, to the detriment of people who are justified in fleeing. The exchange brings his ecstatic mood to an end.

The train stops at a remote station, and Hepzibah and Clifford get off. They take in their surroundings: a decaying church, an abandoned farmhouse, and a chilly rain. Clifford's mood begins to sink. He tells Hepzibah that she must take over. Hepzibah drops to her knees and prays for God's mercy upon them both.

Outside the atmosphere of the train and its temporary respite from reality, Clifford once again feels lost and helpless. He realizes they cannot outrun the fate of the House of the Seven Gables.

CHAPTER 18: GOVERNOR PYNCHEON

Judge Pyncheon, meanwhile, still sits in the **House** of the Seven Gables. He hasn't moved for a long time. He still clutches his pocket watch; perhaps he is in a profound meditation or slumber. But it's surprising that the Judge would linger here, given the plans he made this morning, as he dreamed of spending the next 15 or more years enjoying his real estate and other invested wealth. Today, he had planned on spending no more than half an hour at the Pyncheon house. But now two hours have passed.

In this chapter, the narrator employs a morbid sense of humor and knowing observations (acting as if the Judge's death is only a mysterious sleep) in order to describe the effects of the Judge's untimely demise. He describes the Judge as being a complacent, even entitled man who expected continual good fortune in his life.

After interviewing Clifford, the Judge was to have met with a broker and then attended a real estate auction, at which he'd planned to buy a small portion of the old Pyncheon property, which had belonged to Maule's garden. After various other errands, Judge Pyncheon was supposed to have met with his political party to give a big donation, and to talk with his physician about some trifling symptoms. But it is too late for all that—in fact, it's now the dinner hour, when the Judge was supposed to go to a very consequential dinner indeed, a gathering of friends from several districts across the state. They are waiting for him now—the ones who really control the appointment of political leaders no matter what the expressed will of the people. Had the Judge shown up, he would have left having been virtually named Governor Pyncheon of Massachusetts—a lifetime's ambition.

This detailed accounting of Judge Pyncheon's plans conveys the typical pattern of his life—the life of a man with unlimited resources, who seldom encountered many obstacles to getting his own way. In fact, Judge Pyncheon gets an unusual amount of help in achieving his goals—he was set to be maneuvered into place as the next governor (a cynical clue to Hawthorne's view of politics). The aside about the doctor's visit hints that the Judge had been experiencing health problems, lending ambiguity to his cause of death.

But twilight is growing in the parlor by now. The only distinct sight is the whiteness of the Judge's face, the only sound the ticking of his watch. Then, the **house** begins to creak and groan in the rising wind. Eventually, the city clock chimes midnight. Ghost stories used to be told about what happens in this parlor at midnight—allegedly, the dead Pyncheons assemble to make sure that the Colonel's portrait retains its place, according to his instructions. The Judge never believed such stories, of course.

In contrast to the bustle of the Judge's daily life, the atmosphere in the Pyncheon parlor is as still as a tomb—and the narrator hints that a ghostly rendezvous is about to occur.

But supposing such were true, the Colonel would arrive first. But this time, something vexes him. Generations of other Pyncheon ghosts assemble to study the **portrait**. In the corner stands a carpenter, pointing and laughing inaudibly. Two other figures join the crowd—it appears to be Judge Pyncheon and his only son! How could this be? If it's true that both are dead, then the **House** of the Seven Gables would pass down not to the Judge's descendants, but to Clifford and Hepzibah and Phoebe.

The narrator, in somewhat teasing tones, describes what an assembly of Pyncheon ghosts would theoretically be like. Tonight, the assembly is different from usual. The carpenter—implicitly one of the Maule carpenters—jeers at the Pyncheons, as if the curse has achieved its goal. The sudden appearance of the Judge and his son give a clue—it seems that the Pyncheon greed has been brought to an end at last.

This scene, of course, is mere fantasy, not a part of the actual story. The moonbeams, the wind, and the Judge's immovable figure have prompted these fancies. A strange cat stares unnervingly in the window.

Again, the narrator suggests that this fantastical scene didn't really happen—it's up to the reader to interpret its significance. Meanwhile, the ghostly cat appears again, implying that it's on a quest for a dead soul.

The Judge's watch has at last stopped ticking. Morning is breaking. Will the Judge finally stir and be about his postponed business? A fly stirs on the Judge's once-forbidding face. The shop bell rings, a reminder that life continues outside of this deathly **House**.

The fly on the Judge's face confirms that he is truly dead. Nevertheless, life is going on—showing that even formidable figures like the Judge do not have the power to cheat death.

CHAPTER 19: ALICE'S POSIES

The morning is pleasant, as if nature is making up for the preceding days of storm. In the sunlight, even the **House** of the Seven Gables looks surprisingly welcoming. A careful observer might even spot crimson flowers blooming in the crevice between two of the front gables. These are called Alice's Posies, having grown from seeds Alice had brought from Italy and tossed skyward. Their blooming suggests "that something within the house was consummated."

The sunshine and blooming flowers suggest that the curse has come to an end, as if something sinister has been purged from the house forever.

A little after sunrise, Uncle Venner makes his way down the street, collecting scraps for his pet pig. He is surprised not to find the expected pan of scraps waiting for him on the Seven Gables' back doorstep—Hepzibah isn't usually so forgetful. Holgrave leans out of his gable and greets Uncle Venner. Uncle Venner tells Holgrave that the back of the house has a lonely look, in contrast to Alice's Posies in the front. Holgrave mentions that last night's stormy winds might have convinced him that all the Pyncheon ghosts were congregating in the house, but of course he doesn't believe in ghosts. Uncle Venner mentions having seen Judge Pyncheon enter the house yesterday, and he encourages Holgrave to pick one of Alice's Posies for Phoebe.

Life carries on as normal outside the house, as Uncle Venner and Holgrave chat amicably—though Hepzibah's absence is quite unusual. Both of them are oblivious to any sinister happenings within the house, or at least attribute such signs to rational explanations.

For the next little while, not much happens at the **House**, except that an indignant neighborhood lady demands entrance to the shop. Another neighbor tells her that she thinks the Pyncheons traveled to the Judge's estate in the country yesterday; she saw them leaving. A bit later, Ned Higgins stops by on his way to school and cries when no one is there to sell him his desired gingerbread cookie. Dixey and his companion pass by and gossip about the Pyncheons' whereabouts. Various other merchants and customers stop by the shop and are disappointed.

The shop closure begins to spark discontentment and speculation within the neighborhood, building suspense for the other characters as well as for the reader. Curiously, it seems that people are more concerned with the shop's closure than with the Pyncheons' wellbeing.

The Italian boy with his monkey and barrel organ stop by with a mob of children in tow, accustomed to drawing Phoebe's kind face to the window. In an "intermingling of tragedy with mirth," the Italian boy plays through his cycle of songs, not knowing that his only audience is the dead Judge. The narrator remarks that this is "the emblem of many a human heart."

The mix of morbidity and humor is characteristic of Hawthorne's approach to Gothic imagery. The dead Judge, in the narrator's view, symbolizes a deadened heart that's unresponsive to the joy of the outside world.

As the crowd of children finally disperses, scared of what might lurk in the **House**, Dixey and his companion happen by once again and discover that Judge Pyncheon's card, with yesterday's schedule written on it, had been dropped on the doorstep. Suspecting wrongdoing, they take the card to the city authorities. Not long after, a cab pulls up, and Phoebe steps out. Unsuspecting, she tries various doors, with no success. Ned Higgins shouts a warning from down the street, but he won't come close enough to explain himself.

As the House's ominous silence persists, an increasingly dark mood builds. As Dixey and his friend find suspicious evidence outside, there's also a growing sense that something terrible could come of all this. It's telling that Phoebe, the novel's symbol of innocence, is the one who steps into this scene of looming horror, as it suggests that such seemingly disparate things tend to exist right alongside each other.

Phoebe lets herself into the garden, where she finds only the chickens and a strange cat. Apprehensively, she knocks on the door that opens into the garden. Immediately, it opens inward. Phoebe steps across the threshold.

The cat, the mysteriously opened door, and Phoebe's entrance into a death-haunted house create an expectation of horrors to come.

CHAPTER 20: THE FLOWER OF EDEN

In contrast to the brightness outside, the interior of the **House** is so shadowy that Phoebe cannot tell at first who has opened the door. A warm, gentle hand draws her into an open, sunny reception room, and she now sees that it's Holgrave, smiling at her more joyfully than she has seen before. He tells her, however, that she has arrived at a strange time. He does not know what has become of Hepzibah and Clifford.

The warmth, light, and joy which receive Phoebe inside the house overturn the dark expectations that have been stirred up in the preceding chapter, suggesting that the Pyncheon family's curse has finally been lifted.

Holgrave tells Phoebe that she must be strong and help him cope with a terrible thing that has happened. He shows her a **daguerreotype** of the dead Judge Pyncheon, which he has just finished taking. Upon discovering the body and the missing Pyncheons that morning, he took the photograph in hopes of providing helpful evidence to Clifford in some way. He also has "hereditary reasons" to be concerned about the Judge's fate.

Holgrave is taking a more personal, less detached approach to helping the Pyncheons than he's done before, but his motivations are still mysterious.

Phoebe can't help noticing that Holgrave seems remarkably calm, as if he had expected this to happen. Holgrave conjectures that the Pyncheons have fled in terror, which makes things look very bad for Clifford. Yet it's long been known that the Pyncheons had a tendency to die of a strange medical complaint around the Judge's age (indeed, perhaps Matthew Maule knew of this when he pronounced his curse). This death looks very similar to Jaffrey Pyncheon's death 30 years ago.

Holgrave points out that there is a rational explanation for the Judge's death, as well as previous deaths of Pyncheon men. Even if this is true, there is a dark justice about the similarity of the Judge's death to Uncle Jaffrey's. Further, the rational explanation won't necessarily help Clifford, whose reputation hasn't been fully cleared from his alleged association with the previous strange death.

Although Clifford's flight makes him look guilty, Phoebe says they must entrust the situation to God and call in witnesses. Holgrave agrees, yet he does not hurry to end the secrecy and intimacy he and Phoebe momentarily share. He tells Phoebe how horrified he felt before her arrival—the sight of the dead Judge, with the atmosphere of guilt and retribution, stole his youth. But when Phoebe entered, she brought joy inside with her. He declares his love to Phoebe.

Holgrave seems to be entering into the kind of "second youth" he described to Phoebe earlier—a deeper joy that follows upon an event like falling in love. Phoebe's innocence casts a light over the dark circumstances inside the House.

Phoebe does not believe that a man like Holgrave could find her interesting, or that she could follow his paths. Holgrave replies that his ways are going to change—"the happy man inevitably confines himself within ancient limits." Perhaps he will even build a **house** for future generations. Finally, Phoebe admits that she loves him, too. For a few moments, the two feel surrounded by bliss, no longer conscious of death or sorrow.

Holgrave has undergone a great chance upon falling in love with Phoebe. Much as her love anchored Clifford in reality, it now appears to make Holgrave willing to submit to tradition and conventionality. Their love symbolically triumphs over tragedy in an implied undoing of the House's curse.

Soon, however, they hear someone at the door, and weary footsteps enter. Clifford and Hepzibah are home. Hepzibah bursts into tears of relief when Phoebe runs to embrace her. Clifford smiles at them. He thought of both of them, he says, when he noticed Alice's Posies blooming on the roof—like "the flower of Eden" which blooms in the **House** now.

Clifford and Hepzibah return to the only place they have ever truly belonged, as the young couple's presence seems to have purified it from its old sorrow.

CHAPTER 21: THE DEPARTURE

Judge Pyncheon's sudden death creates a sensation. Yet, as is the case with most people, the community reconciles itself to his loss quickly, especially once it's confirmed that his death appears to have been natural. Rumors still persist—rumors tracing back to Uncle Jaffrey's death 30 years ago. Somehow, a rumor begins to circulate that Clifford wasn't responsible after all. Some claim that a mesmerist friend of Holgrave's saw this in a trance.

Now that the Judge is no longer around to control the local narrative, rumors circulate more freely, leading to Clifford's possible vindication. Though Hawthorne wasn't a fan of the mesmerism craze, in this instance he uses mesmerism as a possible force for truthfulness and justice.

The newly circulating story claims that the youthful Judge Pyncheon was an "irreclaimable scapegrace" of lowly character. One night, the future Judge had searched his uncle's papers. When Uncle Jaffrey stumbled upon his nephew in the act, he suffered a hereditary attack, fell, and struck his head. While waiting for his uncle's death, the Judge discovered a will that favored Clifford, destroyed it, and kept an older one which favored him. He already hated Clifford, and when suspicion fell on the latter, he declined to tell that he'd seen what really happened.

Judge Pyncheon was indirectly responsible for Uncle Jaffrey's death all along, and he allowed Clifford to take the fall for it. This is the soul-rotting wrongdoing that he had suppressed and avoided facing for three decades and which ruined Clifford's life as well. This confirms Hawthorne's ongoing argument that people's exterior personalities tend to conceal their (often sinister) inner character.

About a week after the Judge's death, news of his son's death of cholera reaches them. That means that the entire property passes into the hands of Clifford, Phoebe, and Hepzibah. Though Clifford could be vindicated at this point, it is no longer worth the trouble to him. His situation can never be fully set right, and it's best that time erase the memory of his sufferings.

Even though Clifford is innocent, there is only so far that things can be set right. This suggests that the corrupting effects of the curse can't always be overcome in time to vindicate every victim.

After the Judge's death, however, Clifford is able to be happy. He, Hepzibah, and Phoebe decide to move out of the **House** of the Seven Gables and establish themselves in the Judge's country estate. They, along with Uncle Venner, gather in the parlor one last time. Clifford suddenly remembers that, in his youth, he had discovered a secret spring in the **portrait**. When the spring is pressed, the portrait suddenly tumbles to the floor, revealing a recess in the wall containing a sheet of parchment. The parchment is the Indian deed for the long-ago Pyncheon territory in Maine.

Clifford's story of this discovery, told when he was a boy, misled the Judge into believing that Clifford knew the secret location of Uncle Jaffrey's alleged wealth. Of course, the deed is worthless after all. The portrait literally contained the truth of the situation all along. Now that Holgrave will marry Phoebe, the Pyncheon property will finally be restored to the Maule family.

Holgrave then reveals to Phoebe that he is a descendant of the Maules. He already knew about the secret spring. His ancestor, Thomas, the carpenter who built the **House** of the Seven Gables, built this recess and hid the Indian deed therein.

The reason for Holgrave's longstanding interest in the Pyncheons is finally revealed. As a Maule descendant, his impending marriage to Phoebe symbolically heals the rift between the two families.

Phoebe invites Uncle Venner to come and live with them on the estate, where he can help keep Clifford's spirits up. Clifford urges him to agree, and he does. Then a carriage draws up to convey them all to the country. Clifford and Hepzibah say an unemotional farewell to the **House** of the Seven Gables. When Ned Higgins runs up, Hepzibah gives him a handful of silver as a reward for being her very first customer. Dixey and his companion watch the carriage drive off, and Dixey declares that Hepzibah's cent shop must have been a "pretty good business!" As Uncle Venner walks off, he imagines that he hears Alice Pyncheon playing the harpsichord one last time before floating to heaven.

With the vindication of Clifford, the union of Phoebe and Holgrave, and the vacancy of the House of the Seven Gables, things end happily for the remaining Pyncheon family and their friends—and even for the family ghosts. The cycle of guilt and retribution is over.

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