Chapter 5

The House of the Seven Gables: A New Eden

Hawthorne called *The Scarlet Letter* a "hell fired story." Its publication, however, ensured that Hawthorne did not have to go looking for public office to support himself and his family, and that he could devote himself fully to writing without carrying the crippling burden of financial tensions. Since the book turned out to be a critical, as well as a commercial success, it helped to still any lingering doubts he might have had about his capabilities as a writer. Financially secure, confident about his standing in the literary world, when Hawthorne turned to writing his second romance he was determined to produce a more cheerful book, something more genial, less gloomy, a work with some "sunshine" in it.1 In terms of literary ambition, there is no doubt that in wanting to write a more cheerful book Hawthorne wanted to move from the margins to the centre of the middle class culture.2 In terms of his own literary imagination, however, the desire for a cheerful novel meant that he had to go back to his root concept of universal sin and instead of dwelling on its dark necessity, he would now have to emphasize the scope of human freedom inherent in the concept.

*The House of The Seven Gables,* imports much of the narrative machinery of *The Scarlet Letter.* Like the earlier romance, this one too has a
dominant symbol with characters trying to come to terms with its implications. There is a rich interplay of narrative voices, representing different perspectives and attitudes, as well as the familiar contrast between the official point of view of the authorities, often recorded in documents, and the unofficial point of view of tradition articulated by marginal, often anonymous voices. The overarching distinction between nature and spirit, a setting which includes the Biblical past, the self-conscious dimension with the text holding a mirror to art and to the processes that lead to its own creation and its own adjudications are all present as well.

But unlike The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables shows in Hepzibah and Clifford a partial repair of the breach which guilt had made in the human soul, and in Phoebe and Holgrave a full recovery. Focusing on the relationship of the past with the present, Hawthorne, in this novel, attempts to show that though the past is inextricably linked with the present, it is still possible for the inheritors to undo the knot of the past and chart out a future which is not a re-enactment but a renewal. And for once Hawthorne locates this unique opportunity not in the heroic efforts of gifted individuals, but in aspects of the contemporary democratic culture, in the shared communal values of the 19th century middle class Americans. In other words, in this romance, Hawthorne offers the supreme hope that American culture has the potential to overcome or transcend the metaphysical limitation of man.
The past in *The House of the Seven Gables* is both the Biblical past of all mankind and the Puritan past of the Pyncheons and the Maules. When Matthew Maule built his house, he chose an Arcadian spot, "a natural spring of soft water, a rare treasure on the sea grit peninsula, where the Puritan settlement was made - had early induced (him) to build a hut..." But the original innocence of the spot is violated by the abuse of Maule's right as the first owner and by his unjust persecution as a supposed wizard, by Colonel Pyncheon. Thus, when the house of the Seven Gables is built, the spring turns brackish, and the house itself becomes a symbol of the original guilt which is passed from generation to generation. "If so, we are left to dispose of the awful query, whether each inheritor of the property-conscious of the wrong, and failing to rectify it - did not commit anew the great guilt of his ancestor, and incur all its original responsibilities."

In traditional Christian thought, it is the concept of the inheritance which transforms original sin into universal sin. St. Augustine explains how through inheritance the effects of the fall are transmitted to the later descendants as well. Since all of Adam was corrupted by the fall, his semen too was corrupted, ensuring that the effects of the fall were passed on to his progeny. Also, after the fall, lust marks the action of every human being. And lust being the desire for finite things in and for
themselves, apart from the reference from God, is the distortion of the original communion with God. Since lust is most obviously present in sexual intercourse, the beginning of every human being is in and through lust, so that each is born with a bent towards lust. The explanation establishes that sin necessarily corrupts human beings who then add their own contribution to the sorry history of the fallen world - and so the cycle goes on and on.6

As it is passed on from generation to generation, the house of the seven gables, not only transfers the guilt of the ancestors, but as a valued piece of property also symbolizes the "desire for finite things" on the part of the Pyncheons and the Maule's. The desire for the possession of the house leads to Maule's unjust execution for witchcraft, as also the curse, "god will give him blood to drink" which, seemingly, comes true in the death of Colonel. It also underlies the two hundred year bitterness between the Pyncheons and the Maule's. In the first chapter, in tracing the history of the Pyncheons and the Maules from the early days of American settlement up to the present moment, Hawthorne demonstrates the iron grip of inheritance over the destinies of the later descendants. On the Pyncheon side, later generations inherit, along with the guilt, a false sense of aristocratic nobility, and pride, as well as the practical energy and the acquisitiveness of the old Colonel. As for the Maule's, apart from the
resentment, they inherit “a hereditary character of reserve” which tended to keep them apart from the general multitude, as well as the family eye which was supposed to possess mysterious power.

The present in *The House of the Seven Gables* is being lived by Hepzibah, Clifford, Holgrave, Phoebe and Judge Pyncheon, and it is shown to be intimately linked to the past by the concept of inheritance. Hepzibah and Clifford inherit the great house and with it the guilt and false pride that isolates them from the rest of the society and destroys their vitality. Judge Pyncheon inherits not only the features of Colonel Pyncheon but also his temperament and his ruthless acquisitiveness. The judge’s character shows “that the weakness and defects, the bad passions, the mean tendencies and the moral diseases which lead to crime are handed down from one generation to another by a far surer process of transmission than human law has been able to establish in respect to the riches and honours which it seeks to entail upon posterity.”

Holgrave inherits the mysterious Maule eye and also the hidden hostility of the Maule’s for the Pyncheons. Phoebe, though she comes from outside, bears the ancestral relation to Alice Pyncheon and like her, she too is essentially innocent. As for the house itself, “since so much of mankind’s varied experience had passed there” it was itself “like a great human heart, with a life of its own, and full of rich and sombre reminiscences.” The garden of the house described as “Eden
of a thunder smitten Adam” foregrounds the biblical past that underlies the contemporary action.

Because of the remarkable continuity, the present is seen as virtual prisoner of the past and the mistakes of the past generations threaten to repeat themselves again in the present, as indeed they do in the case of Judge Pyncheon. Not only does he pursue wealth and power with the energy and ruthless unscrupulousness of the old Colonel, but he also meets a similar fate. He too dies in his hour of triumph, his beard saturated with blood. Significantly, the Judge, driven by his inherited aggression manifested in both compulsive economic appropriation and psychological domination, is portrayed as someone who is all pose and no substance, a man who has adopted attitudes for different situations but has no reality of his own, whose self, a mere re-enactment of the past, is in essence dead and empty. As Bruce Michelson rightly points out, “The House of the Seven Gables is about the loss of self. It is about, in other words, the perils inherent in too much tradition, in too much change, in artistic detachment, in social immersion, and the making and reading of romances.”

In an extended analytical passage, the narrator describes men like Jaffrey using the metaphor of the house, which is also the novel’s dominant symbol.
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 honours. With these materials, and with deeds of goodly aspect, done in 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 man's character, or the man himself. Behold, therefore, a palace! Its splendid halls and suites of spacious apartments are floored with a mosaic-work of costly marbles; its windows, the whole height of each room, admit the sunshine through the most transparent of plate-glass; its high cornices are gilded, and its ceiling gorgeously painted... with what fairer and nobler emblem could any man desire to shadow forth his character? Ah; but in some low and obscure nook - some narrow closet on the ground floor, shut locked, and bolted, and the key flung away - or beneath the marble pavement, in a stagnant water puddle, with the richest pattern or mosaic work above - may lie a corpse, half decayed, and still decaying, and diffusing its death-scent all through the palace! The inhabitants will not be conscious of it; for it has long been his daily breath! Neither will the visitors; for they
smell only the rich odours which the master sedulously scatters through the palace, and incense which they bring, and delight to burn before him! Now and then, perchance comes in a seer, before whose gifted eye the whole structure melts into thin air, leaving only the hidden nook, the bolted closet, with cobwebs festooned over its forgotten door, or the deadly hole under the pavement, and the decaying corpse within. Here, then, we are to seek the true emblem of the man's character, and of the deed that gives whatever reality it possesses, to his life.10

Caught up with the world as it is here and now, men like the Judge are unable to penetrate beyond the externals trappings, and to the extent they express themselves only through solid realities of the fallen world, without acknowledging the hidden reality of sin and all its implications, both their creations and their selves, in the final analysis, are seen to be hollow, lifeless, empty. Thus, despite all the trappings of wealth and power and social standing, the real self of the Judge is like a corpse in a palace. Significantly, in the action of the book the Judge himself ends up as one such forgotten corpse left seated in the Library till Holgrave discovers his dead body. Unlike the Judge, by coming to terms with their inheritance, which means coming to terms with the reality of sin, Hepzibah and Clifford as well as Holgrave and Phoebe manage to escape from the trap of
their inheritance. Hepzibah and Clifford regain at least part of their humanity while Holgrave and Phoebe transfigure the earth and make it Eden again. It is by concentrating on this movement of renewal that we will be able to unravel the intricacies of action and arrive at the core of the book’s meaning.

Phoebe, the ancestral descendant of Alice Pyncheon, characterized as unfallen and innocent is the main agent of the renewal effected in the romance. *The Scarlet Letter* had ended with the vision of a prophet - “The angel and the apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusty grief but the ethereal medium of joy.”11 In Phoebe, Hawthorne sets out to create just such an angel, a prophetess, of the domestic values which the book celebrates as the moral centre of democratic life.

A distant cousin, she comes to stay in the house of the Seven Gables from a rural New England village so she is not directly associated with the Pyncheon crime against the Maules. Millington points out that she represents a moment of cultural transition, the shift in population that accompanied the growth of urban centered market, and in the context of the book conceives of the market place as a place of fair exchange rather
than a field of appropriation, possessing a "self-respecting purpose to confer as much benefit as she could anywise receive."\[12\]

Uncle Venner, whose every pronouncement is steeped in folk wisdom, describes Phoebe as an "angel" and in a significant passage that follows, the narrator takes it upon himself to explain in detail the implications of Venner's high praise:

Uncle Venner's eulogium, if it appears rather too high strained for the person and occasion, had nevertheless a sense in which it was both subtle and true. There was a spiritual quality in Phoebe's activity. The life of the long and busy day - spent in occupations that might so easily have taken a squalid and ugly aspect - had been made pleasant, and even lovely, by the spontaneous grace with which these homely duties seemed to bloom out of her character, so that labour, while she dealt with it, had the easy and flexible charm of play. Angels do not toil, but let their good works grow out of them, and so did Phoebe.\[13\]

Her presence lightens the gloom of the dreary mansion, and her genial temperament is the daily comfort of her two forlorn relatives. On the very first day of her visit she displays "the gift of practical arrangement."
...a kind of natural magic, that enables these favoured one's 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. A wild hut of underbrush, tossed together by wayfarers through the primitive forest, would acquire the home aspect by one night's lodging of such a woman, and would retain it, long after the quiet figure had disappeared into the surrounding shade.14

All the exemplary domestic virtues of Phoebe originate not just from her rustic background, or her understanding of the market place as a place for fair exchange rather than appropriation, but also from her "innocence" - her distance from sin. She is the unfallen one, therefore capable of being spontaneously sympathetic. We see this quality of Phoebe in the beneficial influence she has on others when she interacts with them. It is her presence that helps to end the alienation of Hepzibah, Holgrave and even Clifford.

Persons who have wandered, or been expelled, out of the common track of things, even were it for a better system, desire nothing so much as to be led back. They shiver in their loneliness, be it on a mountain top or in a dungeon. Now Phoebe's presence made a home about her - that very sphere
which the outcast, the prisoner, the potentate, the wretch above it, 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.15

By virtue of being the moral centre of the home she is seen to be the guarantor of human reality and human connectedness. And yet despite all her great virtues, in the larger scheme of the book she is shown to be limited. Because her innocence implies a non-awareness of the reality of sin, during the course of the action she has to go through a painful process of education that enables her to come to terms with the reality of the house in which she is living. It is only after she has recognized and accepted the reality of sin that she can play her part in the creation of New Eden at the end of the book.

The author makes it clear that Phoebe’s innocence is a limitation in the context of the book. She is very good for Clifford, but we are told that she is incapable of understanding his real self because “her sphere lay too much in the actual.” This limitation is made even more visible in her
assessment of Judge Pyncheon’s character. When Hepzibah warns her that the Judge is wicked, she does not believe her and concludes that the latter’s judgement was coloured by the family feud. “A wider scope of view and a deeper insight may see rank, dignity and station all proved illusory, so far as regards to their claim to human reverence, and yet not feel as if the universe were thereby tumbled 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...”16

It is this blindness about the negative forces operating beneath the surface of things that makes her such an easy victim of Holgrave’s mesmerism. In the earlier era, Alice had put blind faith in her own innocence and purity and had come to grief falling under Maule’s spell. Phoebe too would have been lost, but for the fact that Holgrave, at a critical point, is able to resist the temptation of establishing his control over her. In the course of action, it is this preconceived optimism, this easy faith in world’s goodness, which Phoebe loses.

She tells Holgrave before she leaves for the country, “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!”17 Holgrave puts her “loss” in perspective by commenting, “you have lost
nothing worth keeping, nor which it was possible to keep.” He goes on to say that in the development of the soul it is only by losing the ‘shallow gayety of youth” that one recovers profounder happiness. The book records precisely such a growth in Phoebe. When she returns from the country sojourn, we are told that she is not like the Phoebe who had arrived earlier. “Though not altogether so blooming as when she first tripped into our story for, in the few intervening weeks, her experience had made her graver, more womanly and deeper eyed, in token of heart, that had begun to suspect its depths.” And it is this grown and changed Phoebe who with Holgrave later transfigures the earth into another Eden, overthrowing the mighty hold of the past on the present.

II

In the novel, Hawthorne self-consciously examines problems concerning the American artist in particular, and artists in general, by creating two artist figures in Clifford and Holgrave. In the grasping and materialistic nineteenth century America, the artist was generally an isolated and misunderstood figure. In his story “The Artist of the Beautiful”, Hawthorne had given full expression to the conflict between the artist Owen Warland and his hostile environment. In The House of the Seven Gables, the same theme is echoed once again for Clifford is characterized as an abortive lover of the beautiful, who is utterly helpless before the grasping
energy of the materialistic judge because of his aesthetic temperament. Hawthorne states explicitly that any conflict between them is like flinging a porcelain vase, with already a crack in it, against “a granite column.” Through this unequal match, Hawthorne depicts how the hard competitive drives that underlie the growing commercialism turn against and crush a potentially richer aesthetic existence.

In this book, however, all is not well on the aesthetic front either. Unlike Owen Warland, Clifford is not idolized and Hawthorne uses him to pinpoint the weaknesses and defects that can underlie the artistic temperament. Through Clifford, he shows that the excessive fondness of beauty can easily lead one away from the chaotic human existence, and the isolation can breed a selfish demand for the gratification of one’s own need. A nature like Clifford’s, Hawthorne points out, is always “selfish in its essence,” and this selfishness is clearly visible in the instinctive way in which he turns away from Hepzibah just because she was old and ugly. Such was his inherent selfishness that the narrator finds it necessary to comment, “It is even possible that if Clifford, in his foregoing life, had enjoyed the means of cultivating his taste to its utmost perfectibility, that subtle attribute might before this period, have completely eaten out or filed away his affection.” And from this point of view, even his long confinement had its advantages; “shall we venture to pronounce, therefore,
that his long and black calamity may not have had a redeeming drop of mercy at the bottom?"21

If Clifford is the broken, selfish, non-functional artist of the beautiful, he is also a representative of broken humanity, seemingly victim of cruel providence:

Clifford saw, it may be, in the mirror of his deeper consciousness, that he was an example and representative of that great chaos of people, whom an inexplicable Providence is continually putting at cross-purposes with the world; breaking what seems its own promise in their nature; withholding their proper food, and setting poison before them for a banquet; and thus - when it might so easily, as one would think, have been adjusted otherwise - making their existence a strangeness, a solitude, and torment.22

Clifford's cure too is seen in terms of ending his isolation and confinement within the house. When a political procession passes on the Pyncheon street, it seemed to Clifford that "it was a mighty river of life" and he feels if he were to join it, he would become another man. "He needed a shock or perhaps he required to take a deep plunge into the ocean of human life,
and to sink down and be covered by its profoundness, and then to emerge, sobered, invigorated, restored to the world and to himself.”

His escape from the house, after Judge Pyncheon’s death, and his travel on the railroad is seen as just such a plunge. The railroad is described as “life itself,” and during the journey Clifford displays uncharacteristic initiative, energy and intellectual vigour as he develops his cyclic view of history. Finally, after the house has been restored to a Maule, and the 200 year old burden of guilt has been removed, we are shown a Clifford who has recovered a part of his faculties and who also has it in his heart to be kind to uncle Venner. The author comments, “The first effect of his freedom, as we have witnessed in Clifford’s aimless flight, was tremulous exhilaration. Subsiding from it he did not sink into his former intellectual apathy. He, never, it is true, attained the full measure of what might have been his intellectual faculties. But he recovered enough of them to light up his character...”

Clifford’s partial redemption begins only after he had plunged into life by his escape on the railroad, and after he had learned to value uncle Venner’s simplicity and goodness. Significantly, all these changes in Clifford are linked to his growing awareness of the working of sin in human history in general, and his own history in particular. “You are aware, my dear Sir,” he
tells the old gentleman on the train, “that all human progress is in a circle...
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... The past is but a corpse and sensual prophecy of the present and future.” Applying his new found wisdom to his own particular situation, he goes on to say, “what we call real estate - the solid ground to build a house on - is the broad foundation on which nearly all the guilt of the world rest. A man will commit almost any wrong - he will heap up an immense pile of wickedness, as hard as granite, and which will weigh as heavily upon his soul, to eternal ages - only to build a great, gloomy dark chambered mansion, for himself to die in, and for his posterity to be miserable in.”25 In short, Clifford’s partial redemption as the lover of the beautiful is directly linked to his growing awareness of the workings of sin, and resultant growth in sympathy as manifest in his treatment of both Hepzibah and Venner.

Through Holgrave, Hawthorne highlights some of the other dangers that can beset the artist. Holgrave, as an artist embodies, the ideals that Hawthorne the romance writer holds before us.26 The connection is strongly established through the description of his work as a daguerreotypes. Being a photographer, he is a practitioner of an empirical art-form, but his claims for his art rest on non-empirical romance ideals.
“There is wonderful insight in Heaven’s broad and simple sunshine. While we give it credit for only depicting the surface, it actually brings out the secret character, with a truth, that no painter could ever venture upon, even if he could detect it.”

Thus, through his picture of the Judge, he is able to portray the reality beyond the public facade of benevolence which the Judge puts up. Also he is repeatedly associated with the fountain, that, as Millington points out, is the “book’s clearest invocation of the romance place.”

As an artist, therefore, he is shown to exposed to the danger of becoming a mere cold hearted observer of life. He is shown to have an inquiring and analytical mind both ego-centric, and, in human terms, cold. When Phoebe refuses to pry deeply into Clifford’s soul, Holgrave asserts, “had I your opportunities, no scruple would prevent me from fathoming Clifford to the full depth of my plummet line.”

The same cold analytical mind is clearly reflected in the reasons which he gives for his irrational involvement with the fate of the two Pyncheons: “It is not my impulse, as regards these two individuals, either to help or to hinder, but to look on, to analyze, to explain matters to myself, and to comprehend the drama which for almost two hundred years has been dragging its slow strength over the ground where you and I now tread. If permitted to witness the close, I
Phoebe is appalled at this and she begins to doubt whether Holgrave is a friend or an enemy. She points out that he seems to be looking at Hepzibah’s and Clifford’s misfortunes as if it was all part of a tragedy. “I do not like this,” she goes on to say categorically, “the play costs the performers too much and the audience is too cold hearted.”

Matthew Maul, in an earlier era, had displayed a similar cold arrogance in his treatment of Alice Pyncheon. The past suddenly catches up with Holgrave when Phoebe, listening to his story, is nearly mesmerized. He could see as he finished his story “that with one wave of the hand, and a corresponding effort of his will he could complete his mastery over her.”

The temptation to do so is enormous and Hawthorne deliberately links the temptation to the qualities Holgrave had inherited from his past, his cold inquiring mind and his egoistic desire to exercise power over others. “To a disposition like Holgrave, at once speculative and active, there is no temptation so great as the opportunity of acquiring an empire over the human spirit, nor any idea more seductive to a young man, than to become the arbiter of a young girl’s destiny.” That Holgrave is able to overcome this temptation is a victory over the negative self that he had inherited.
from the past. His complete emergence from the past, however, is possible only when he realizes that as an audience he is not all that distant, that his cold hearted observation of the Pyncheon drama was actually destroying him too. After the death of Judge Pyncheon, his arrogance melts away in the face of precisely this realization and he is able to surrender fully to the rejuvenating love of Phoebe. "The presence of the yonder dead man threw a great black shadow over everything; he made the universe, so far as my perception could reach, a scene of guilt and of retribution more dreadful than the guilt. The sense of it took away my youth. I never hoped to feel young again! The world looked strange, wild, evil, hostile; my past life, so lonesome and dreary; my future, a shapeless gloom, which I must mould into gloomy shapes! But Phoebe, you crossed the threshold; and hope, warmth and joy came in with you! The black moment at once became a blissful one. It must not pass without the spoken word. I love you."35

It is his love for Phoebe that finally helps him to emerge out of the prison of his own ego and eventually join Phoebe in creating a new Eden. Holgrave's later recapitulation of his own radical position, however, unconvincing or unsatisfactory it might seem to some readers, is seen by Hawthorne as something positive because it marks the complete surrender of his ego and, therefore, the snapping of the last link with the dead past.
The two portraits of the artist are framed within two major thematic concerns of Hawthorne: contemporary American history and sexuality. The contrast between Hepzibah and Clifford, who are the direct inheritors of the Pyncheon guilt and the comparative outsiders, Phoebe and Holgrave, is deliberately developed by Hawthorne as a contrast between old gentility and the rising democracy. Phoebe's self-reliance, her vitality and her ability to manage the kitchen and the shop are credited to the fact that her father married beneath his rank; while Hepzibah's genteel helplessness, her inability to merge with human sympathies, is seen to be a result of "her deeply cherished and ridiculous consciousness of long descent, her shadowy claim to princely territory." It was, Hawthorne goes on to state explicitly, "a fair parallel between New Plebianism and old Gentility."

If Clifford, the abortive artist of the beautiful is presented as representative of broken humanity, the novel presents Holgrave as a representative young American. Homeless, continually changing his whereabouts and his occupation, he nevertheless possesses an identity of his own and also a conscience. He thinks of himself as a thinker who wants to discover his own path. Summing him up, the narrator writes:

Altogether in his culture and want of culture, in his crude, wild misty philosophy, and the practical experience that counteracted some of its tendencies, in his magnanimous zeal of man's
welfare and his recklessness of whatever the ages had establishe~
man's behalf; in his faith and infidelity, in what he had and what he lacked - the artist might fitly enough stand forth as the representative of many compeers in his native land.39

And as a representative American he hates the past and looks forward to the future. He tells Phoebe:

...Just think a moment, and it will startle you to see what slaves we are to bygone times - to Death, if we give the matter the right word... A Dead Man, if he happens to have made a will, disposes of wealth no longer his own... A Dead Man sits on all our judgement seats; and living judges do but search out and repeat his decisions. We read in Dead Men's books! We laugh at Dead Men's jokes, and cry at Dead Men's pathos! We are sick of Dead Men's diseases, physical and moral, and die of the same remedies with which dead doctors killed their patients! We worship the living deity according to Dead Men's forms and creeds! Whatever we seek to do, of our own free motion, a Dead Man's icy hand obstructs us!... And we must be dead ourselves before we can begin to have our proper influence on our own world, which will then be no longer our world, but the world of
another generation, with which we shall have no shadow of a right to interfere...40

He repeatedly reiterates the advantages of democracy and frowns upon the older aristocratic system. He tells Hepzibah, "These names of gentleman and lady had a meaning in the past history of the world and conferred privileges, desirable or otherwise, on those entitled to bear them. In the present- and still more in the future condition of society - they imply, not privileges, but restrictions." 41

The significance of rising democracy and healthy advantages for mankind associated with it are made apparent not just through the representative figures of Phoebe and Holgrave, but also through the actions and reactions of Hepzibah and Clifford. After opening the shop and regaining part of her humanity, even Hepzibah "begins to entertain a sentiment of virulence towards the idle aristocracy to which it had been so recently been her pride to belong."42 And Clifford at one dramatic moment, wants to end his isolation once and for all by joining a passing political procession.

Although the superiority of the democrats vis-à-vis the older, feudal gentility is stressed, Hawthorne is conscious of the limitations that go with democratic individualism and his representative characters have to face
and overcome these limitations before they can create a new Eden. Phoebe has to grow out of her settled and easy optimism and come to terms with the harsh realities around, while Holgrave has to rise above the perils of egoism and has to learn to treat human beings as human beings and not as objects of cold-hearted inquiry.43

Paralleling this, is the presentation and analysis of the other major force that was shaping contemporary American society - the Capitalist ownership of private property and the lust for wealth that went with it. In the Preface, Hawthorne had commented on the folly of “tumbling down an avalanche of gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim and crush them...” and in the book, this theme is reiterated continuously.

It is because of this sustained criticism of the ownership of private property and all that it brings in its wake that the conclusion seems forced. In the end, we see Phoebe, Hepzibah, Clifford and Holgrave happily driving off into the sunset after inheriting the property of the villainous judge. The judge, being a reincarnation of the old Colonel, stands as a type for the ruthless crafty, immoral and greedy individual who would do anything to accumulate wealth and his legacy cannot be cleansed merely by handing it over to one of his victims. In the interests of poetic justice, Hawthorne
seems to have over-looked the fact that in bestowing ill-gotten gain on all those who had been previously deprived of it, he was sowing all over again, the same seeds of evil.

Mattheissen seeks to explain the contradiction by emphasizing Hawthorne's faith in the continuation of the democratic opportunity. Mattheissen writes, "He (Hawthorne) took for granted that in democratic society, the domineering influence of private wealth would not be able to hold the evil sway that it did in the narrowly aristocratic era of the Colonel Pyncheon."44 Alan Gardener Smith sees in the ending the least attractive ideology of the American Renaissance – "a yet another attempt to reconcile economic inequality by imposing a symbolic reading of wealth."45 For Millington, however, it is an "alliance between the vision of human connection located in the domestic sphere and the critical perspective that can penetrate and disrupt the strategies of representation that maintain the authoritarian" in the process, redefining the Hawthornian romance as a "cultural medium for the negotiation of such an alliance."46

This problematic ending, however, highlights one of the major characteristics of all of Hawthorne's writings. His conviction about the reality of evil being the only truth available to man enables him to penetrate the front put up by individual and society and identify all that is
going wrong - but the same conviction undercut his ability to suggest any
effective countermeasure that would cure the ills that he has himself
pinpointed. His writings are full of radical perceptions but there are no
radical remedies. Because in his framework it is neither possible nor
desirable for man to try and cure the original cause of all that is wrong, in
terms of the day-to-day world of buying and selling, he is automatically
left upholding the status quo. This characteristic is particularly noticeable
in this novel because he has provided it with a “happy ending”. His other
romances, in accord with his dark, imaginative logic, close darkly.

The contrast between the guilty and the less guilty, between old gentility
and new Plebianism is worked out in terms of sexuality as well. Hepzibah
and Clifford, isolated in their mansion and living utterly in the past, are
entirely devoid of any sexuality. Phoebe and Holgrave are, on the other
hand, vital and sensual. Holgrave is portrayed as young and energetic, with
a forceful and energetic personality, which attracts Phoebe. While Phoebe
for all her innocence, rouses some form of sexual desire in the Judge and
even in the decrepit Clifford. Sexuality in the book is, therefore, seen as
both vitalizing and humanizing. But inherent in his treatment of the theme
is the acute realization that without sympathy, sexuality would degenerate
into a vicious war of the sexes, the desire of the male to dominate the
female, and the effort of the female to resist the domination.
The most striking illustration of Hawthorne’s consciousness of what sexuality can degenerate into, is his description of the life of the Puritans and their treatment of their wives. In tracing the similarities between Colonel Pyncheon, the original progenitor, and Judge Pyncheon his later reincarnation, Hawthorne writes:

    The puritan - if not belied by some singular stories, murmured even at this day, under the narrator’s breath - had fallen into certain transgressions to which men of his great animal development, whatever their faith or principles, must continue liable, until they put off impurity, along with the gross earthly substance that involves it... The Puritan, again, an autocrat in his own household had worn out three wives and, merely by the remorseless weight and hardness of his character in the conjugal relation, had sent them, one after another, broken hearted, to their grave... The judge had wedded but a single wife, and lost her in the third and fourth year of their marriage. There was a fable... that the lady got her death blow in the honeymoon, and never smiled again, because her husband compelled her to serve him with coffee, every morning at his bedside, in token of fidelity to her liege and master. 48

The phenomenon of mesmerism lends itself easily to discussion of sexuality and it is through mesmerism that Hawthorne analyzes the nature
of conflict inherent in man woman relationship, both in *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. In this novel, Alice and Maule are attracted to each other but because of the pride of the former, and the revengefulness of the latter, the attraction degenerates into a conflict between "woman’s might" and "man’s might" which as Hawthorne points out, is a "match not often equal on the part of woman". Alice loses, becomes a plaything of the Maule and dies a horrible death. Phoebe too feels the magnetism of Holgrave’s personality and is exposed to the same danger as Alice. The effects of mesmerism are once again described in terms of sado-masochistic sexual surrender. "With the lids drooping over her eyes, ... she leaned slightly towards him, and seemed almost to regulate her breath by his... His glance, as he fastened on the young girl, grew involuntarily more concentrated; in his attitude there was the consciousness of power, investing his hardly mature figure with a dignity that did not belong to this physical manifestation."49

There is in the book a fresh look at the romantic aesthetics of reception.50 A major criterion of judging the excellence of a work of art in the romantic period was that of intensity, its capacity to cast a spell on its audience and move it to its very depths. In Hawthorne, however, any phenomenon that gives one individual power over others is suspect. Hawthorne dramatizes and analyses the dangers inherent in the romantic aesthetics of reception.
through the phenomenon of mesmerism. Holgrave tells Phoebe the story of Matthew Maule and Alice. He tells it in such a way that he ends up exercising full control over his audience. So much so that he could have, with just a little extra effort, once again perpetrated the crime of Matthew Maule. Unlike Matthew, Holgrave resists the temptation and goes on to create with Phoebe's help a new Eden. Significantly, Holgrave's movement of renewal also begins only after he had shed his coldness and his habit of detached observation, and only after he had discovered in the love of Phoebe the value of surrendering the self rather than holding on to it egoistically.

Finally, in this novel too, the title of the novel refers to the dominant symbol of the book, so that if the house is like the great human heart, it can also be likened to Hawthorne's house of fiction. "In its complexity", writes Campbell, "the metaphor of the house/body/text becomes a symbol of narrative representation - a symbol aware of its critical function...the metaphorical identity of the body and the house functions as a means of examining the representation of narrative language." 51

In the Preface itself, the act of writing is explicitly associated with the building of the House:
The reader may perhaps choose to assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of this narrative. If permitted by the historical connection (which, though slight, was essential to his plan,) the Author would very willingly have avoided anything of this nature. Not to speak of other objections, it exposes the Romance to an inflexible and exceedingly dangerous species of criticism, by bringing his fancy pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment. It has been no part of his object, however, to describe local manners, nor in any way to meddle with characteristics of a community for whom he cherishes a proper respect and a natural regard. He trusts not to be considered as unpardonably offending, by laying out a street that infringes upon nobody's rights, and appropriating a lot of land which had no visible owner, and building a house, of materials long in use of constructing castles in the air.

Much of what Hawthorne has to say about the House, therefore, self-reflexively refers back to his understanding of what is a romance and the function that it is supposed to serve in society at large. Thus, the book too can inherit the guilt of its creator, which can then be passed on to the readers unless, it can untie the knot of sin by embodying the value of sympathy. The fact that the synthesis evolved by Holgrave and Phoebe at
the end can accommodate both Clifford and Uncle Venner is meant to demonstrate that the novel is in fact grounded in sympathy. Dryden is right when he suggests that in writing the romance Hawthorne is involved in the most social of activities: that of building an abode which "infringes on nobody's private rights" yet allows him a sense of freedom as well as a meaningful contact with others. "The Novel's central tension derives from Hawthorne's realization, on the one hand, that history teaches the impossibility of man's ever being able to be at home with others and his subjective commitment, on the other, to man's undying belief in a dream house, a place that will allow man to be at home with others and with himself."52

The term "home" in this sense has significant Biblical connotations as well. According to Northrop Frye, in the New Testament, the journey to the spiritual kingdom begins with "metonia" a word which, says Frye, is usually erroneously translated as repentance but which actually means a spiritual metamorphosis, "an enlarged vision of the dimensions of human life." The opposition between "metonia" and sin splits the world into the kingdom of genuine identity which Christ calls "home", and "hell" - a world of anguish and torment which man goes on making for himself. The appearance of Christ and the Gospel of "metonia", according to Frye, makes of man a new creature for whom the "original and now fallen order
of nature becomes a mother bringing to birth a re-creation made through a 
union of God and man (Romans 8:21)." It is a process which we see 
being re-enacted at the end of The House of the Seven Gables as well. 
However, in the Hawthornian romance the enlarged vision of the 
dimensions of human existence that leads to the creation of a new Eden is 
seen to be rooted in human consciousness and not religious revelation.
NOTES


4 Hawthorne, Novels 356.

5 Hawthorne, Novels 368.


7 Hawthorne, Novels 454.

8 Hawthorne, Novels 374.

9 Bruce Michelson, “Hawthorne’s House of Three Stories” 77.

10 Hawthorne, Novels 449-450.

11 Hawthorne, Novels 344-345.

12 Millington, Practicing Romance 115

13 Hawthorne, Novels 422

14 Hawthorne, Novels 413

15 Hawthorne, Novels 472

16 Hawthorne, Novels 465

17 Hawthorne, Novels 536

18 Hawthorne, Novels 536
19 Hawthorne, *Novels* 607.

20 See Frederick Newberry, “‘The Artist of the Beautiful’: Crossing the Transcendent Divide in Hawthorne’s Fiction” *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 50: 78-96. Newberry presents a heroic Owen Warland and suggests that the emergence of the butterfly forces us to reconsider the creative powers of fantasy and imagination by deliberately undermining mimetic representation.

21 Hawthorne, *Novels* 448.

22 Hawthorne, *Novels* 480-481.

23 Hawthorne, *Novels* 495.

24 Hawthorne, *Novels* 622.


26 Holgrave claims to have written for *Goodie’s Magazine* and *Lady’s Book* and *Graham Magazine*. Hawthorne had also published stories in each of these magazines.

27 Hawthorne, *Novels* 577-578.

28 See Joseph Filbert. “‘That Look Beneath’: Hawthorne’s Portrait of Benevolence” in *Critical Essays on Hawthorne’s The House of the Seven Gables* ed. Bernard Rosenthal, (New York: G.K.Hall, 1995) 114-128. Filbert argues that Hawthorne adapted ideas about benevolence and sympathy from Adam Smith, Francis Hutcheson, Thomas Brown, Dugald Stewart and David Hartley. According to Filbert, “The consistent distinction in his works between a natural sentiment that bonds us to fellow humans, and a parallel tendency that prompts us to exploit even those closest to us appears to have been influenced by the debate in these works concerning the nature of this sentiment. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, he portrays in the most vivid manner the differences between the sham of the humanitarian benevolence and the sincerity of the human sentiment of sympathy” (119).

29 Millington, *Practicing Romance* 134.

30 Hawthorne, *Novels* 505.

31 Hawthorne, *Novels* 539.
32 Hawthorne, Novels 539.
33 Hawthorne, Novels 534.
34 Hawthorne, Novels 534.
35 Hawthorne, Novels 615.
36 For Hepzibah’s social representativeness see Brodhead, Hawthorne, Melville and the Novel, 74-75.
37 Hawthorne, Novels 421.
38 Hawthorne, Novels 421.
39 Hawthorne, Novels 507-508.
40 Hawthorne, Novels 509.
41 Hawthorne, Novels 390.
42 Hawthorne, Novels 399.
43 In her readings of The House of the Seven Gables, Nina Baym has tended to focus on Holgrave. On Holgrave as figure of fertility and democratic energy see The Shape of Hawthorne’s Career and on Holgrave as an artist hero see “The Failure of the Artist Hero” in Critical Essays on Hawthorne’s The House of the Seven Gables.
45 Allan Gardner Lloyd Smith, Eve Tempted: Writing and Sexuality in Hawthorne’s Fiction (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984), 47.
46 Millington, Practicing Romance 136.
47 For an analysis of this socio-sexual underpinnings of the text see Teresa Goddu, “The Circulation of Women in The House of the Seven Gables” in Studies in the Novel 23-1 (1991): 119-127. To Goddu, the logic of the ending makes sense when viewed through the lens of sexual politics for the democratic model gains in conviction through the proper circulation of women within society. He demonstrates that the three women, Hepzibah, Alice, and Phoebe Pyncheon, and the modes of circulation associated with
them - incest, forced exchange and alliance, respectively - work together to reinforce the conservative vision of social exchange.

48 Hawthorne, Novels 457.

49 Hawthorne, Novels 534.

50 For Kenneth Dauber in Rediscovering Hawthorne the book is above all an attempt to achieve imitation connection with a community of readers.

51 Charles Campbell, "Representing Representation: Body as Figure, Frame, and Text in The House of the Seven Gables." Arizona Quarterly (winter 1995) vol. 47 number 4.
