

Afterword

The House of the Seven Gables was Hawthorne's second major work, the earlier having been *The Scarlet Letter*. As that previous novel made clear the unbending will and iron rule of the Puritan cast of mind, so does *The House of the Seven Gables* show what came of that same harsh code in later days.

A family, accursed, not really by Matthew Maule on his way to the gallows but by their own way of life and greed, moves to round out a tragic circle.

Hepzibah faces what she considers the worst hour of her existence when she, a lady of undisputed lineage, must keep a cent store and deal with the outside world she knows nothing of, a world which has long since sloughed off all the pretense which built her walls of defense. She holds as tightly as she can to stern standards and dares not wish for any more return in the future than duty will allow her.

Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon holds to his own defenses also—the end-product of greed and self-satisfaction. To him, as to his grim ancestors, his own desires and needs are paramount. He is the reincarnation, in these last throes of the house of Pyncheon, of the seventeenth-century notable who was its founder.

Clifford, who has been broken by the nature of his own heritage, is a ghost coming to show the loss of all the passion, will, anger, and self-control which he can no longer face. But, broken as he is, Clifford can start anew, shutting out the old shadows and fears, stretching out his hands to that which is not the treasure of his line but the freedom beyond it.

Phoebe owes nothing to the past. She is as free as Clifford has longed to be. From her is born a new line which cannot be cursed because it does not accept curses.

The House of the Seven Gables thus clearly displays the two intertwined branches of Hawthorne's own beliefs, and part of his family history as well, for he was a descendant of one who sent men and women to be hung as witches. It also demonstrates the psychological truth that the shadowed past can hold those who permit themselves to be held prisoner, but that for those willing to move forward, such ghosts cannot trouble their joy.

It is the uncurtaining of a very old window to let in the full light of the sun.

—Andre Norton