

## The House of the Seven Gables by Nathaniel Hawthorne

The House of the Seven Gables begins with a preface that identifies the work as a romance, not a novel. As such, Hawthorne prepares readers for the fluid mixture of realism and fantasy that the romance genre allows. The preface also conveys the major theme of the book, which Hawthorne refers to as a moral: "the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and . . . becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief."

A battered house with seven gables stands in a small New England town. (Gables are the triangular structures formed by two intersecting points of a roof.) The house, which belongs to the Pyncheon family, has a long and controversial history. In the mid-1600s, a local farmer named Matthew Maule builds a house on fertile land near a pleasant spring. In the late 1600s, the surrounding neighborhood has become fashionable, and the wealthy Colonel Pyncheon covets Maule's land. Several years later, Maule is hanged for witchcraft, and rumors abound that Pyncheon was behind Maule's conviction. Maule curses Colonel Pyncheon from the scaffold, but the Colonel is unfazed; he even hires Maule's own son to build him a new mansion with seven gables on the property. At a party held to inaugurate his new mansion, the Colonel is found dead in his study, his beard covered in blood. The Colonel has left a will ordering that his portrait not be taken down, but one of his important documents—the deed for a giant land claim in Maine—is missing. The deed is never found, and generations of Pyncheons search for it in vain. From then on, the Pyncheon house continues to bring bad luck, culminating with young Clifford Pyncheon's alleged murder of his uncle.

### Early years

Hawthorne's ancestors had lived in Salem since the 17th century. His earliest American ancestor, William Hathorne (Nathaniel added the w to the name when he began to write), was a magistrate who had sentenced a Quaker woman to public whipping.

### Symbolism in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables

Nathaniel Hawthorne is famous for his psychological and moral themes. He is also famous for using symbolism in presenting his poignant themes of sin and its consequences. This research paper studies the use of symbols in Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables* as an example of his general use of symbolism in his novels. The general pattern of Hawthorne's symbolism is that he presents one major symbol that embodies the main idea, and supports it with a number of minor symbols that develop and elucidate it. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the major symbol is the house itself, which stands for corruption, evil, and the injustice of the past. This symbol is supported by such secondary symbols as the heart, the fountain, the interchange of light and dark, and the human characters themselves.

The minor symbols, in this novel, include the heart, the double symbol of the light and dark, and the progression of the characters themselves. The heart, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, is represented by various things depending on the character concerned; it is symbolized by a prison, a dungeon, a well, and a mansion. Clifford's heart is the prison of his deep grieves for his lost years. Jaffery, who is Clifford's cousin, feels that his heart is a dark dungeon in which he is a slave because of his tyrannical actions against the others; for "what dungeon", writes Hawthorne, "so dark as one's own heart! What jailor so inexorable as one's self." (p. 183)

The well which Matthew Maule built in the garden years before symbolizes Maule's heart which threatens others by its vengeance because its existence beside the house is a challenge for the house and for the Pyncheons, as it may cause the fall or ruin of the house.

But the most important symbol that represents the heart is the house itself which is shown as to

stand for the residual heart of all its inhabitants.

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