

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

الرمزية في رواية
البيت ذو الرخامات السبعة لناتانيال هوثورن

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Abstract

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.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) is famous for his moralistic and psychological approach to the theme of sin and its effects on sinners. More significantly, he is also a symbolist who does not present his ideas in direct, clear-cut images, but rather through a set of symbols that recur frequently throughout the novel or short story.

Hawthorne seems to have understood human experience as having meanings beyond itself: Most persons, things and actions do not mean only what they are but always have second meanings. He does not say what these other meanings are exactly, but rather suggests a variety of interpretations, leaving the reader to choose the one which suits his (or her) frame of mind. This method is usually called the multiple-choice device, which has become a typical characteristic of Hawthorne's writings.

In almost all Hawthorne's stories and novels, there is one framework of symbolic patterning in which all symbols are interrelated and assimilated: In each work, there is one major symbol that dominates and figures out in the whole work. With it, there are many minor symbols that revolve around and complete it. They shed more light on it and give it further meanings; and by so doing, they make it clearer and more effective.

This symbolic pattern can best be seen in Hawthorne's second novel, *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), which he describes as "a more natural book for me to write",¹ because its plot, where mystery and the supernatural are mixed together, is congenial to his mind.

II

The plot of *The House of the Seven Gables* revolves around a feud between two families: the aristocratic Pyncheons and the common Maules, which started many generations ago as a result of a long dispute over a land owned by Matthew Maule. Colonel Pyncheon occupied that land by force and sent Matthew Maule to the gallows by accusing him of being a wizard. Before his death, Matthew uttered his curse upon the Pyncheons: "God will give him blood to drink".² This curse continued to haunt the Pyncheons for generations. First, Clifford Pyncheon, a member of the family, was sentenced to prison for thirty years for the murder of his uncle. Second, Alice Pyncheon, another victim from the family, died broken hearted after being betrayed by a young man from the Maules. Colonel Pyncheon died mysteriously; and finally the curse ended with the death of Jaffery Pyncheon in a mysterious way as well. Besides, the Pyncheons' house that was built on the disputed land grew gloomier after each death. The course of the curse changed when Phoebe, a very kind, loving young girl from the Pyncheon family, came to live in the house with her spinster aunt, Hepzibah, who is another victim of the curse, and Clifford after his release from prison. Phoebe's love affair with Holgrave, a young daguerreotypist from the Maules, changed all things in the life of both families.

The dominant symbol in the novel is the house itself, and all the other symbols are minor ones enhancing the major symbol. In fact, the house, which is a symbol of the deeds of the past, unites the other symbols, which are seen as its multiple properties: its heart is the great chimney, its eyes are its arched windows through which it sees, its spirit is the old Colonel Pyncheon's room, its garden is the stained Eden of the Pyncheons' past sin.³ Hawthorne, in this respect, describes the garden as "the Eden of a thunder-smitten Adam who fled for refuge thither out of the same dreamy and perilous wilderness into which the original Adam was expelled." (p. 143)

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.

These various symbols of the heart lead to one main point, which is the evilness of the human heart whether it is represented by a prison, a dungeon, a well or a mansion. In every one of these symbols, there is an evil which Hawthorne tries to reveal, emphasizing that there must be a transformation in the heart to bring salvation about. For Hawthorne, the transformation of a person cannot occur unless it starts with his heart. If the heart is able to transform itself, then progression is possible. This is what happens to Holgrave; he reads to Phoebe a manuscript which speaks about Alice Pyncheon's tragic death after being betrayed by the young Maule, and for the first time he becomes aware of the deeper meaning of the story. He recognizes the great injustice and the hateful evil which his relative has done to the innocent Alice who has loved and trusted him. Thus, a change happens in his character. Holgrave, who has intended originally to avenge his family upon the Pyncheons by trapping Phoebe in his love and deserting her later, has come to realize at last the futility of hatred and evil. He finds that what really fills his heart is not evil but strong love.⁴

The water of Maules' well, which he built in the middle of the garden, is not only the heart of the curse, but also a reminder of the Pyncheons' sin. These gloomy symbols that surround the house, the well and the garden, represent the inanimate symbols of the curse. The living symbol of the curse, on the other hand, is Judge Pyncheon

himself. His sudden death becomes a mystery to all the characters and the readers as well. Hawthorne frames this mysterious death in his multiple choice device: He gives many possible explanations for the judge's death. The multiple choice device is given through clues which can be interpreted in various ways. The story of the judge's death comes first through the daguerreotypist, Holgrave, who reports that the judge died on a stormy weather on the fifth day of Easter. This may mean that the death is a kind of happiness for those who wish it, especially the Maules, since Easter is a time of happiness for the Christians. But the happiness, here, is for the judge's death, not for Easter.⁵

Clifford is put forward as a suspect for the death of the judge, since the latter has been eager to meet Clifford after his release from prison thinking that he has some information about the lost map of the Pyncheons' territories. Yet, Hawthorne, in his description of the events that happened before the death, does not show anything that may refer to Clifford's relation to the judge's death. In fact, Hawthorne shows that at the night of the murder, Clifford was in his room wrapped in a blanket unable to communicate with anyone except for his sister, Hepzibah, who used to take care of him. But at the same time the narrator says that Hepzibah has noticed Clifford's absence from his room for a short while before the murder. Hawthorne, thus, gives many conflicting details so as to make the action more confusing, since he dislikes bringing his scenes into a direct contact with the realities of the moment, i.e. he does not want to give a direct solution to the cause of the death.

The details of the death are also told through old and traditional stories, old wives' tales, and through Holgrave's story about Alice Pyncheon, who dies in a tragic way as a result of her love for the young Matthew Maule. The young man pretends he loves her, but his love turns out to be just a desire for revenge upon the Pyncheons because of his hatred for them. He has made her a slave of him, and then deliberately deserted her to marry another woman, a marriage that broke her heart and caused her death. He does not intend to kill her, but only to humiliate her, hence he feels remorse which makes him gloomy and darkens his face:

But, last in the procession, came Matthew gnashing his teeth, as if he would have bitten his own heart in twain- the darkest and woefulest man that ever walked behind a corps. He meant to humble Alice, not to kill her; but he had taken a woman's delicate soul into his rude gripe; to play with- and she was dead. (p. 194)

All this ambiguity and confusion concerning the Colonel's death clearly indicates that Hawthorne wants his readers to choose their own explanations and interpretations that they think reasonable of what he presents throughout the events of the novel.⁶

It seems that the deaths that affected the entire course of the events are concerned with the effect of the curse on the characters and the way it is progressively lifted. And in order to lift the curse, the characters must overcome the dark idea of revenge and hatred. To do this, Hawthorne uses the conventional symbol of progression, which is originally taken from the Puritan idea that man needs to progress from his dark evil ideas to a complete trust in faith so that they may attain salvation. Hawthorne uses this symbolic device so as to brighten the gloomy atmosphere of the novel. The progression is presented by the triumph of the symbol of the light over darkness. The symbol of the light, in the novel, is Phoebe, whose entry to Clifford's and Hepzibah's life marks the starting point for the progress of the characters. Her temporary absence from the house is marked by the return of brightness into the whole atmosphere of the gloomy house.⁷

Darkness, on the other hand, is marked by the presence of Judge Pyncheon, who represents the agent of evil and who is characterized by his dark inner world, which he tries to conceal in his outer world. His inner world is symbolized by his inner room in the house where his soul and body reside, while the outer world is where the Judge is in contact with the people of his society, and the way he seems to appear to them, for he never shows his real identity to these people. These two worlds, where the double symbol of light and dark alternates, show the double face of the Judge, the one people think he is, the outer world, and the one he really is, the inner one.⁸

The double symbol of the light and dark is also related to the life and death of the Judge whom Hawthorne describes as an “owl, bewildered in the daylight, and hastening back to his hollow tree at night”. (p. 24) The Judge lies in bed during the morning refusing any medical advice and during the night his life comes to its end. Shadows grow deep on the old furniture and finally blackness covers his face as he dies.

The Judge’s death brings light to the outer world of Hephzibah and Clifford whose lives are overshadowed by the curse. At the moment of his death, Clifford psychologically improves, for he is released from his mental imprisonment in the past, an imprisonment from which he could not set himself free even after his physical release from prison. Hence he was unable to be in contact with the changes that happened in the world during his thirty years of imprisonment. Hephzibah, on the other hand, progresses by giving up her proud, aristocratic conviction of superiority. And by her love for Clifford and her devotion to him, she does not only help him, but also helps herself. The ride they take together from the house to the countryside symbolizes their spiritual rebirth, for it is a mutual journey from the evilness of the town to the purity of the countryside. It is the first time they have seen the outer world, which they have always feared, in a realistic way.⁹ Their abandonment of the house also symbolizes their abandonment of the past and its evils and miseries for a new life, brighter and happier than the life they have led heretofore.

Holgrave, who is, in one way or another, the representative of Hawthorne himself- a writer and reformer- progresses from being a rationalist, a man of the mind, to being a more open-hearted man of love and emotion. Hawthorne reveals through him the wrong-headedness of the reformer. The marriage of Holgrave and Phoebe functions, on one level, as being a symbol of resolving the long feud between the Maules and the Pyncheons, which finally ends the curse, and, on a broader level, it symbolizes the end of the feud between the rising democracy represented by the Maules and the waning aristocracy represented by the Pyncheons.¹⁰

Obviously, Hawthorne has intended his characters to be better studied and understood as a group; each one completing the other in one way or another. And by using the conventional symbol of progression, he seems to be saying that progress is possible when the influence of the past is left behind, while his moral conveys that each generation is responsible for its own actions and must be able to control them and make the individuals reform their behaviors so as to benefit from the experiences of those who have preceded them.¹¹

III

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne can be considered a symbolist because he presents his ideas through a number of symbols that carry a variety of meanings. His plan is that he makes the house of the Pyncheon family a central symbol that stands for the past with all its evils and abuses. Then he brings a number of other minor symbols that reinforce the central one. The heart is a symbol of evil whether it is represented by a prison, a dungeon, Maule's well or the mansion itself, especially because only hatred and the desire for vengeance and harm dwell in it or, in the best of cases, only sorrow and grief.

Throughout the novel, the struggle between the dark and the light is dominant, and the fate of all the characters is dependent on the result of this struggle. The dark, clearly, symbolizes evil or hatred, whereas the light represents goodness or love. The general movement of action in the novel is from dark to light. Thus, at the end of the novel, love prevails: Holgrave, the descendent of the Maules gives up his plan of revenge upon Phoebe, the descendent of the Pyncheons, and marries her. Thus, he does exactly the opposite of what his ancestor, Matthew Maule, has done to Alice Pyncheon, the delicate girl who loves him sincerely and devotedly. He prefers

love and marriage to hatred and revenge. And by this marriage between Holgrave and Phoebe, the curse is lifted and love dominates in the life of both characters. This happy end is enforced by Hepzibah's and Clifford's desertion of the family house which stands for all the evils of the past in favor of a better life in the countryside.

Notes

¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, "An Afterwards", in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (New York: The American Library), p. 279.

² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 22. Subsequent references to this edition will be referred to by page number(s) that will appear within the text.

³ Richard H. Fogle, "Introduction" to *The House of the Seven Gables* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 8.

⁴ Michael A. Gilmore, *The Middle Way: Puritanism and Ideology in American Romantic Fiction* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1977), p. 123.

⁵ Alfred H. Marks, "Who Killed Judge Pyncheon? The Role of Imagination in *The House of Seven Gables*", *PMLA*, 71 (1956), p. 357.

⁶ Richard Brodhead, *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 364.

⁷ Michael Davitt Bell, *Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 219.

⁸ Harold Orel, "The Double Symbol", *American Literature*, 23 (1952), 1-2.

⁹ Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 285.

¹⁰ Bell, pp. 217-218.

¹¹ Brook Thomas, "The House of the Seven Gables: Reading the Romance of America", *PMLA*, 97 (1982), 106.

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الرمزية في رواية البيت ذو الرخامات السبعة لناثانيال هوثورن

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يعالج الروائي الأمريكي ناثانيال هوثورن (1804-1864) موضوعة الخطيئة وتأثيراتها على المخطئين من الناحيتين النفسية والأخلاقية، إلا أنه يقدم موضوعه عبر مجموعة من الرموز التي تأخذ نمطا واحدا يسود في معظم رواياته. وضمن هذا النمط، ثمة رمز رئيسي واحد يحتل مركزا محوريا في الرواية أو القصة القصيرة. وهناك مجموعة أخرى من الرموز الثانوية ذات الصلة بالرمز الرئيسي تتمحور حوله وتعطيه أبعادا جديدة وتجعله أكثر وضوحا.

ويتضح هذا النمط الرمزي في رواية البيت ذو الرخامات السبعة التي تدور حول صراع بين عائلتين: عائلة بنتشون الأستقراطية وعائلة مول الذين هم من عامة الناس. وقد ابتدأ الصراع أولا على قطعة أرض تعود لماثيو مول ولكن العقيد بنتشون يغتصبها غصبا ويرسل غريمه الى المقصلة بتهمة ممارسة السحر. وقد بنى عليها قصرا فخما أقام فيه. وقد تعرض هو وأحفاده الى سلسلة من الفواجع نتيجة للجنة أطلقها ماثيو بول وحاول أحفاده الثأر من عائلة بنتشون.

الرمز الرئيسي في الرواية هو القصر نفسه الذي أقيم على الأرض المغتصبة، ويرمز الى الشر والجنس والرغبة في الأستحواذ. كما يرمز الى الماضي وما حصل فيه من أحداث، الماضي الذي ظل الجميع يعيشون فيه ولا يستطيعون منه فكاكا. أما الرموز الثانوية التي تتصل بالقصر وتعمق معانيه فهي تتخذ أشكالا وأشياء مختلفة، كالقلب البشري، وتناوب الضياء والظلام، وتطور شخصيات الرواية أنفسهم.

القلب البشري في هذه الرواية إما يرمز الى السجن أو الزنزانة المظلمة حيث يحبس الأنسان نفسه فيه يعتاش على الكراهية والرغبة بالانتقام أو يرمز الى البئر الذي بناه ماثيو مول قبل إغتصاب أرضه. والبئر الذي يقع في منتصف الأرض هنا يرمز الى القلب، مركز الكراهية والرغبة بالانتقام، وماؤه الجاري قد يمثل إستمرار هذه الكراهية في قلوب أحفاده خصوصا وأن هذا الماء يسبب الضرر للقصر ويهدد بإسقاطه. كما أن القصر نفسه يمثل القلب حيث يسكن آل بنتشون.

الضياء والظلام كرمزين في الرواية يرمزان الى الخير والشر اللذان يتناوبان بين حين وآخر. وتسير أحداث الرواية من الظلام الى النور حيث ينتصر نور الخير والمحبة في الأخير حين يكتشف بطل الرواية هولكريف مول، الساعي الى الانتقام من فيبي بنتشون، أنه يحبها صدقا ويتزوجها في الأخير لتنتهي اللعنة وتزول.

كما أن تطور الشخصيات في الرواية يحمل دلالات رمزية. حيث يشعر القاريء أن هؤلاء الناس يجب أن يتغلبوا على الكراهية والرغبة في الانتقام لكي يتطوروا. وهذا ما حصل في الأخير لدى فيبي وهولكريف اللذان يبدان الكراهية والانتقام ويختاران المحبة والزواج وبذا يجمعان العائلتين وينشآن عائلة جديدة مكونة من إتحاد العائلتين. كما أن قيام كلفورد وهزبياه بنتشون بترك القصر ومغادرته للسكن في الريف يرمز الى ترك الماضي الأليم وبدء حياة جديدة بعيدا عنه.