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Becoming Majestic: Theater and the Paradox of Individuality in *The House of the Seven Gables*

Most of the criticism on the writings of Hawthorne focus on his family, religion, and class. Each of these themes has a direct connection to Hawthorne's life: his ancestors were involved in the Salem Witch Trials, something which Hawthorne felt extremely guilty about. These ancestors used religion to defend their decisions and persecution of the "witches" of Salem which lead Hawthorne to see religion as a dangerous and confusing force in society. He also felt conflicted about the status which he inherited from his ancestors. All of this makes the themes of family, religion, and class very attractive and powerful; when interpreting Hawthorne's work, they are hard to see past. However, Hawthorne's work is more complicated than that; as Hawthorne himself said, "'When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one" (viii). I intend to interpret one of these subtle processes in Hawthorne's novel, *The House of the Seven Gables*. I will attempt to move beyond the more common and well documented themes by focusing on the 11th chapter, "The Arched Window". In this chapter, Hawthorne's thoughts are more condensed and spoken straight at us rather than through his characters and plots. Through an examination of "The Arched

Window” we can find the key to those subtle processes taking place not only *in* that chapter but in the rest of the book, as well. In “The Arched Window”, Hawthorne makes a change in form in order to put the focus squarely on his main argument: the relationship between the individual and humanity. While the relationship between the individual and their familial guilt as it is shown in Hawthorne’s works has been examined extensively, the relationship between the individual and humanity has been neglected, much like “The Arched Window” itself. I will be using an examination of this chapter to show the methods and motives behind Hawthorne’s establishment of the theatrical stage and the exploration of the paradox of the individual which he enacts upon it.

The story of Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* is created and carried out within the confines of the titular House. The narrative travels back and forth through time, but almost never moves outside of the House and its small garden until the end of the book. This serves as a release from the narrative as Hawthorne very deliberately releases both his characters and his readers from the stifling closeness of the House. It is only after the characters have left the House that the story can end. The House is the stage to which the characters have been tethered: they begin the story by arriving at the House, and at the end, they leave. The book functions “not [as] a line, but a circle... its conclusion contained in its starting point” (Beebe 3). This description by Maurice Beebe conveys not only the fact that the characters are drawn in and released, but also the contained aspect of the novel. While Beebe was only talking about form, I would argue this is also true of the actual content and narrative. Only in the “Arched

Window” is the *focus* outside of the House rather than inside. There are some other scenes that happen outside of the House, but they still center on the House in some way: first, a train ride spent exploring the guilt which comes with inheriting the House, and second, a view from the street describing the performance of the mysterious ghostly inhabitants of the House. As Don Loftis Latham Jr. wrote “the house [functions] as a kind of theater, in which the characters perform for one another as well as for the townspeople of Salem. (93). It is in “The Arched Window” that this relationship is reversed. All of this makes “The Arched Window” stand out starkly against the rest of the book.

Not only is the change in setting important for establishing a change in approach, it also instrumental in his ability to make his points freely. Hawthorne *couldn't* have illustrated the sweeping philosophies in “The Arched Window” from within the House. As Patricia Carlson put it, Hawthorne uses “actuality as a stage on which to play his parables of morality” (164). To her, the most important part of this technique was a reliance upon the realistic. However, she argues that this is true of the whole book, that Hawthorne used his own experience with the world to create a base for his romances as a whole. I would argue that reliance upon the realistic is more important within “The Arched Window” than it is anywhere else in the novel. After all, Hawthorne said himself that *The House of the Seven Gables* is merely a “romance”, not a reflection of anything in the real world. In order to make statements about the real world, he must first step into that world, or out of the House. By focusing on the realistic, he keeps his point uncluttered by the symbolism carried in the fantastical attributes of the rest of the book.

The House itself is a fantastical object, half ghost, so any such series of scenes played out within the House would have that surreal light cast over them. By removing his focus from the inside of the House, Hawthorne can construct his arguments on the stage of the street without the weight of the House upon them.

The theatrical nature of the chapter is evoked for a similar reason: Hawthorne needed to be able to create whatever arguments and characters he want, and the stage affords him that freedom. Throughout the novel, Hawthorne has made his readers watchers in a voyeuristic sense, but each moment of that watching was focused on a character within the House or on the House itself (Latham 96). This chapter is also the only case where someone is watching the same place the readers are watching *from*. After all, the window they watch through works both ways. The watched can see in at the watchers. Before this point, the reader has always been on the outside of the House or the outside of a room looking in, but now they stand with the characters looking out at the world on display. From this different perspective, Hawthorne is able to use theatricality to establish both an audience and a collection of performers. This change in narrative form is set up in the very first paragraph of the chapter.

Fancying... that it might be for [Clifford's] benefit occasionally to diversify the scene, Phoebe sometimes suggested that he should look out upon the life of the street. For this purpose, they used to mount the staircase together, to the second story of the House, where, at the termination of a wide entry, there was an arched window of uncommonly large dimensions, shaded by a pair of curtains... At this arched window, throwing it open but keeping himself in comparative obscurity by

means of a curtain Clifford had an opportunity of witnessing such a portion of the great world's movement as might be supposed to roll through one of the retired streets of a not very populous city. (121)

Right away we see a sign that Hawthorne intends to change his approach to his story. The readers who have been cooped up inside the House with Clifford will now have a chance to see an external, diversified scene. The word "scene" in particular is important here because it alludes to the theater-like performance to come. Clifford and Phoebe make their climb up the inside of the House, a journey which puts the focus on the actual structure of the inside of the House described here in greater detail than anywhere else. This description of their path draws our eye along with them through this empty space, terminating in yet another theater-like image: we are the audience before this window surrounded by curtains, this stage set just for us and the Pyncheon cousins. The word "window" is actually a misnomer: the window "opened above the porch, where there had formerly been a balcony, the balustrade of which had long since gone to decay, and been removed." Not only is it metaphorically the opening to a stage, it is also historically a door. It opens onto a balcony which is no longer safe to stand on. The railing has crumbled away and been removed. Even if someone could go out on that balcony, there is no way to get to the ground. They don't watch through a door on the first floor, but the second. This goes to show that Clifford isn't a part of the play going on below. He is removed from the action, and the action is outside of his story. It is instead presented on a stage where Hawthorne can make points outside of the constraints of the

narrative and the characters. It is this freedom which Hawthorne is trying to establish via the theatrical nature of the chapter.

On this stage he has now established, Hawthorne directs a series of vignettes, illustrations of points he wishes to make that lie outside of the House and also outside of his *narrative*. While these scenes are viewed only through a window inside the House, the view from that window is wider than any other Hawthorne has described so far in the book, and the sudden opening up onto the street before the House, a street which seems to be a microcosm of the whole world and Hawthorne's view of it, is striking. While "The Arched Window" is viewed from within the House, it casts a light on the whole of humanity through its variety of scenes and characters. This moving away from the cloistered narrative to theatrical scenes signals a distinct change of form. These vignettes aren't simply presented in succession; they are all bookended by the narrator's reflections upon the scenes.

The clearest illustration of the narrator's freedom and control over the subject matter is seen following the description of the mechanical characters inside the Italian boy's organ: "The Italian turned a crank; and, behold! every one of these small individuals started into the most curious vivacity..." (124). He explores the repeated actions of the "little society" in a kind of existential pondering that leads to a rather depressing conclusion: all of our efforts towards accomplishment or change are bound to be merely a repetition of the past without ever actually affecting our lives (124). However, returning to the tone of good humor that is sustained throughout the book, though interrupted occasionally by cutting comments on society and familial guilt and

inheritance, the narrator closes his tangent with “we reject the whole moral of the show” (124). This is an example of the writing technique which Hawthorne uses to voice his unrestrained opinions, a technique which is carried throughout the chapter: the narrator uses the stage of the street to make statements and reach conclusions of his own without reference to the mental facilities, values, or concerns of the characters or the Pyncheon family, deciding for himself how to feel. From these musings the narrator moves on to the monkey, viewing and interpreting him in this manner as well. While the narrator does draw his own conclusions in other places in the book, in every other case these conclusions center around and are determined by the behavior or personality of one of the main characters of the book. It is only in “The Arched Window” that conclusions about the nature of New Englanders and humanity as a whole is explored without the mediation of one of the characters, and it is primarily this exploration which connects the activities on display before the arched window.

The audience for this display is, of course, his reader, but there is also another spectator. The readers are joined at the arched window by Clifford Pyncheon and his caretakers, his young cousin Phoebe and his ancient sister Hepzibah. It is the story and mystery of Clifford Pyncheon which dominates the book as well as the imaginations of the other characters. He is an odd combination of young and old, innocent and weathered. A young man of taste and refinement imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit, Clifford aged physically while reverting to a childlike state mentally, a childlike state with glimpses of genius. To the narrator, he was a paragon of good taste and refinement who was made crude by his life: “There seemed no necessity for his having

drawn breath at all... but as he had breathed, it ought always to have been the balmiest of summer air” (105). However, the air inside the House of the Seven Gables is anything but fresh. It is an ancient and crumbling structure haunted by the ghosts of the ancestral Pyncheons. In an attempt to relieve the gloom and monotony of the House, Clifford’s caretakers bring him up to the arched window. The fact that it is Clifford who is looking out of the window is also important to Hawthorne’s narrative technique in this chapter: Clifford is a character outside of society. He had been imprisoned for most of his life and then remained cloistered with his sister and cousin inside the House. He can view the scenes outside of the window with fresh eyes, eyes unaccustomed to any of the modern ways of life. Like the reader, he is discovering each scene as it occurs. If another character, perhaps Phoebe Pyncheon, had been the focal point at the window, the narrator’s contemplation of the scene would have been colored by her domestically industrious view of the world. Clifford is removed from the scene, watching the mundane experiences with “inconsequential interest and earnestness” (126). By removing himself so completely from the rest of society, his emotions in relation to it come to be seemingly unreal and impotent. The outside world is hostile; he has lost his place in it due to seclusion, sadness, and ignorance, represented by the inaccessibility of the crowd below. Clifford has been broken by his seclusion from all things beautiful; thus, his mind is a clean slate for the narrator to paint on his philosophies.

The central philosophy meditated upon in the chapter is that of the individual versus the group, the tension Hawthorne feels between his prejudices and disdain for people and his feelings of civic responsibility and brotherhood towards humanity. This



culminates in the passing of a political parade. In his exploration of the carnivalesque and use of public processions in Hawthorne's work, Eric Fretz argues that processions are used as a "stage", as a background for the actions of the main characters (13). The crowds of people serve to highlight the character's "plight in the midst of public activities", to "remind [them] of days gone by, of... happiness" (Fretz 13, 14). For *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne seems to be using the procession in a completely different way. In fact, I'd say he is instead using the characters as a background for the procession, rather than the other way around. The characters are used to interpret the parade, and this interpretation leads to a revelation about humanity as a whole. This parade at once horrifies and entrances both the narrator and Clifford, but it is the examination of the parade itself rather than the emotion it causes in Clifford which leads to Hawthorne's main point.

As a mere object of sight, nothing is more deficient in picturesque features than a procession seen in its passage through narrow streets. The spectator feels it to be fools play, when he can distinguish the tedious commonplace of each man's visage, with the perspiration and weary self-importance on it, and the very cut of his pantaloons, and the stiffness or laxity of his shirt collar, and the dust on the back of his black coat. In order to become majestic, it should be viewed from some vantage point... for then, by its remoteness, it melts into one broad mass of existence—one great life—one collected body of mankind, with a vast homogeneous spirit animating it. But, on the other hand, if an impressionable person, standing alone over the brink of one of these processions, should behold

it, not in its atoms, but in its aggregate—as a mighty river of life, massive in its tide, and black with mystery, and, out of its depths, calling to the kindred depth within him—then the contiguity would add to the effect. It might so fascinate him that he would hardly be restrained from plunging into the surging stream of human sympathies. (126)

Hawthorne uses the parade to illustrate a state in which the “happiness and jollity” commonly associated with parades “take on a mask of an underlying gloom and despondency” (Fretz 12). We as readers stand with Clifford above this sea of people and are encouraged to feel the same sort of “repugnance” as he does. Visually, this tide is ugly. We *see* each man covered in dust and sweat, as common as any of the rest, making lots of noise with lots of confidence. Given the description of their collars, pants, coats, and faces, it seems as though we could see everything about these men, all of these indicators of what their lives might be like, and somehow, despite any differences, they are all fundamentally the same. Despite their individuality when it comes to our simply being able to *see* them, mere objects of sight, they fundamentally are a group of monotonous characteristics, and each one of these characteristics is shameful and lowly. They’re sweaty, dusty, and arrogant. They are horrible and ignorant of their own unimportance, how they are all commonplace, and they are all fools. And yet, taken as a whole and from some height, they are a beautiful creature. All of mankind is reflected in this group, and all of mankind joins with “one spirit”. And it is this massive thing which is a reflection of the complexity of an individual in actuality. Seen in a group of this kind, they are commonplace fools, but seen as humanity itself, they are beautiful, and

standing in awareness of that vast thing they are beautiful as well. This is the paradox of Hawthorne's feelings towards his fellow man: they are powerful and weak, hideous and beautiful, unified and distinct.

The parade is not the only thing in the chapter which illustrates this paradox. It can also be seen in the relationship between Clifford and the outside world. While he is watching the crowd, they are watching him: "he and Phoebe made a sight as well worth seeing as any that the city could exhibit" (121). Clifford attempts to hide himself, "peering from behind the faded crimson of the curtain", and perhaps he doesn't know that he is seen, but they do make a spectacle of themselves (121).

The pale gray, childish, aged, melancholy, yet often simply cheerful, and sometimes delicately intelligent aspect of Clifford... watching the monotony of everyday occurrences with a kind of inconsequential interest and earnestness, and, at every petty throb of his sensibility, turning for sympathy to the eyes of the bright young girl! (121)

Although, by the end of the chapter, Clifford is blowing bubbles into the street, sending "little impalpable worlds" down to the ground and people below, at the point above he sees himself as an observer, not a participant. Yet, he is touching the lives of the people below. He is removed, an isolated individual within the fortress of his ancestral guilt; after all, it was his ancestors who would have removed the railing from the balcony rendering it unsafe. But even here he is a part of humanity. People, the world, enter the House through the shop door. They see him through the window. He is a cut-off individual *and* a component of a whole; he seems to serve as a human representative of

the paradox. Hawthorne even ascribes paradoxical features to Clifford, even more blatantly than he did to the marchers: he is young and old, happy and sad. He is at once a horribly flawed human and a member of the “surging stream of human sympathies” (126).

While there are other philosophies and judgements considered in the chapter, they have been explored extensively by critics, but this particular dichotomy has not been the focus of much literary criticism of Hawthorne. Most critics approach the question of the individual from either a political perspective or as a by-product of the isolation within the book. The political reading is worth further examination, and I do examine it in greater depth below, but the isolation approach seem to get things backwards. To them, given the sheer volume of papers on the subject, the isolation within Hawthorne’s writings is much more important than individualism. However, I would argue that it is the struggle between the individual and the group which caused Hawthorne’s feelings of isolation, not the other way around.<sup>1</sup> Hawthorne was removed from society as an artist and observer. His purpose was to write stories in response to and reflecting the things he experienced in his life: familial guilt, isolation, inequality. In this position he saw himself as powerful in a way which could cause him to feel like an outsider. As Maurice Beebe put is, “for Hawthorne... the artist, a part of God, is also like God” (4). Thus, from his Godlike position, he necessarily couldn’t completely join the

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that I am talking exclusively about Hawthorne’s feelings of isolation; the theories of Hawthorne’s literal isolation have been debunked (Beebe 12). Saying that Hawthorne was isolated because he stayed inside and thus out of the world would be trivial, but saying that he felt isolated while surrounded by people is more meaningful. It is also worth noting that for Clifford, as a literary object, staying inside is more meaningful because it is that isolation that symbolizes his actual exclusion from society.

great river of humanity. His mind became his prison, as he said himself in a letter to Longfellow: “By some witchcraft or other... I have been carried apart from the main current of life, and find it impossible to get back again.... I have made a captive of myself, and put me in a dungeon, and now I cannot find the key” (Cowley 552). By reading this closely, it is clear that the inability to merge into the masses is what causes the feeling of isolation. Hawthorne has control over his own isolation, a control which is expressed in a reflexive sentence; he did this to himself.

There is also another side to Hawthorne’s own self-isolation: secrecy. He was isolated in part because of his own willful withholding of information. The act of the performance of the self is closely related to the concealment of traits which we would prefer others not see. In *The House of the Seven Gables* we see this in Clifford’s hiding from the eyes of the crowd, in Hepzibah’s hermitage, and in both the Judge and Holgrave’s secrecy involving the truth of their character, but concealment was also something which Hawthorne valued in his own life. He leads his readers to believe that there is some “secret” hidden in his works and his life which, if figured out, would be the key to all of his work. The possibilities for what that secret may be are many: “Was Hawthorne mortified by the incest trial of Anstice Manning, as Young proposes? Was he gay? Was he sexually abused in boyhood by his uncle Robert? Did he suffer lifelong from unresolved grief at the boyhood loss of his father?” (Herbert 270). It seems impossible to sift through all of the mysteries of Hawthorne’s life, but it also seems unnecessary. What matters is the fact that he withheld these parts of himself. So while Hawthorne valued a connection with humanity, he also resisted that connection because of his own

wish for privacy. Of course, this hardly seems like a trait particular to Hawthorne, but it is important in an examination of Hawthorne's feelings about individuality and belonging because it shows one of the ways in which his isolation was his own doing. However, the source of his exclusion from the world is unknown to him; it happens "by some witchcraft or other" (Cowley 552). His feeling of exclusion leads to his figurative self-imprisonment.

The causal relationship is also true of Clifford in "The Arched Window". This can be seen in another of the vignettes in the chapter in which Clifford watches people going to church on Sunday. The idea of joining the worshipers in their communal trip to church is extremely attractive to Clifford. He rushes to convince Hepzibah to go with him; he rushes to get them both dressed in their nicest (ancient) clothes; he rushes the door and throws it open and... stops. He suddenly becomes aware of how different he and Hepzibah are from the rest of the church goers. He compares his clothes and himself to them and finds himself too ridiculous to leave. He cannot transition from an individual with all his imperfections and ugliness to a part of the beautiful tide of life. It is because of this that he then goes back in the House to close himself up again, isolated.

However, Clifford's relationship with the brotherhood of humanity isn't quite that simple all the time. Clifford is intrigued and repelled by the rest of the world. He watches the scissor-grinder passing in the street, and he is a welcome and nostalgic sight, but Clifford does not go down to him. Or, perhaps, there is simply no safe way to get to the ground. Clifford tries to do just that: "he shuddered; he grew pale... at last, with tremulous limbs, he started up, set his foot on the window sill, and in an instant

more would have been in the unguarded balcony... had [he] attained the balcony, he would probably have leapt into the street" (126). However, it was a futile effort; Hepzibah and Phoebe pull him back into the hall. If he had succeeded, he would have been leaping to his death. "Perhaps, again, he required nothing less than... death!" the narrator muses (127). The only way that seems open for Clifford to join the living is not a way to join the living at all: it is a way to join the dead. Clifford is controlled by his own hedonistic tendencies and it is these tendencies which isolate him from society. His tastes are too refined to be satisfied by the masses, and the masses would have to bow to his own needs for him to join them: "this being should not have been made mortal, or mortal existence should have been tempered to his qualities" (105). Clifford is "selfish in... essence", so it makes sense that he would be unable to join the tide of humanity in Hawthorne's writing (81). To Hawthorne, a big part of that connection to society was protesting the iniquities faced by other humans, a connection based on a selfless act (Hall 133). Because he cannot understand what it takes to be a part of the world, Clifford's entry into humanity would mean his own death. This would also be the end of his individuality; the ghosts in the story are all trapped together within the House repeating the same ritual together. Hawthorne is using the parade to "tease" Clifford with the possibility of transformation and connection, but it is ultimately impossible (Fretz 12). I would argue against Maurice Beebe's conclusion that jumping from the arched window would be an escape resulting in a reawakening, if a momentary one, of masculinity and vigor (Beebe 9). The logic behind this seems to be that, by jumping out of the window, Clifford is asserting his own independence and power. However, he

would still be jumping out a window. He knew how high off the ground he was; he was looking out at the ground, so he knew he would likely die jumping from that height. If he had jumped, it would either have been suicide, or a childish and thoughtless act in keeping with his childlike knowledge. If it is the former, then it is an act, not of defiance, but defeat. The narrator often says or implies that Clifford ought to die, but Clifford doesn't hint at any such desire. In fact, he thinks of himself more often as already dead. If he jumped knowingly, then he wouldn't be acting independently, but rather as a way to give in to the demands of the narrator, his cousin, and the townspeople who all think he is a murderer. If he jumped for childish reasons, in the same vein as blowing the bubbles, then he wouldn't have been doing deliberate acts because he wouldn't have known what the immediate consequences would be, and thus couldn't knowingly and deliberately chose to pursue them. So, he doesn't join the world for the short moment while he's jumping. Perhaps, to Hawthorne, the only way to resolve the paradox of one's individual humanity is to die. This certainly doesn't cast a good light on being part of a group, but it is within the mass of the parade that the individual marchers are made majestic and powerful. Once again, Clifford lives in a paradox: he is in the world and not.

Clifford is obviously Hawthorne's focus here, but Phoebe serves as a sharp contrast at the window. Phoebe is there to show once again that Clifford is not entirely cut-off from the scene below; he has a connection to brightness and youth through her. However, he is not completely comfortable with that connection. He hides himself behind the curtain, waiting in the wings of life, perhaps to emerge upon the stage,



perhaps not. The world that he looks out on is not a dangerous one, not busy or wild, but it is threatening to him in that it shows the destruction of the world of his childhood.

The street, like Clifford and the past, is “retired”, is no longer in use. Signs of the past do come through, normally riding on the discordant music of some ancient instrument: the bells of baker’s cart and the hissing of the tools of scissor-grinder, but the future continues to loom in the form of his cousin who betrayed him, Judge Pyncheon. The humanity of the present is not one to which Clifford belongs. He is out of sync. Thus, he is a part of the world, blowing bubbles, and he is not. He is isolated, and he is not.

By examining Clifford’s isolation and complicated relationship to the world in the context of Hawthorne’s opinions expressed informally in letters, we can get a better idea of the way that the individual and the group, as well as the past and the present, function within the chapter. It is possible that in Clifford’s disgust for the parade marchers we can glimpse a trait of Hawthorne himself: his prejudice. Hawthorne’s “conscience was painfully twinged by the social indignities of which the... lower classes were living examples” (Hall 129). He was disgusted by their uncleanliness and their illnesses: he wrote they “keep among themselves... plagues which have long since ceased to afflict more fortunate societies” (Hall 129). He goes on to say that it would be a horrible thing if the poor got their revenge on the upper class by coughing on them, essentially. This feeling of superiority is demonstrated clearly in “The Arched Window”: the average men in their dusty coats should be subsumed into the mass, but it would mean death to a man from a good family with a taste for beauty. Hawthorne was

attracted to the “mighty river of life”, a river he didn’t want to join because of the people in it.

This disgust for the lower classes didn’t coincidentally occur in Hawthorne, and the basis for it can be used to examine another aspect of the paradox in “The Arched Window”. According to Lawrence Hall, this feeling of indignation towards people is an inheritance from Hawthorne’s Calvinist ancestors, but the tension created results from his personal views on equality (129). This sort of battle between past and present is something which Hawthorne was preoccupied with throughout the book. To him, the crowd of the parade symbolized progressive ideas of the future: democracy, socialism, equality. The individuals represented all of the indignation of the higher class for the lower, but the group represented brotherhood and the future. Hawthorne is battling in “The Arched Window” with his two conflicting political ideas. In his own life, he seemed to fall finally on the side of democracy, the present, and the group. He came from a well-to-do family which afforded him a certain status and arrogance. However, he had great disdain for the aristocratic New Englanders of his time. He judges the inactivity of Hepzibah as her fortune slowly diminished to nothing as an aloof laziness and selfishness. He uses her as a representative of the “decayed, otiose aristocracy in the utilitarian climate of the United States” (Sterne 75). Hawthorne’s inheritance was also tainted for him by his sense of guilt for what his ancestors did during the Salem Witch Trials, and because of this, he felt it was his duty to assist the poor. We see the same conclusion to that battle in the end of “The Arched Window”. The chapter ends with the image of Judge Pyncheon catching Clifford at the window with his bubbles, with this

remnant of the past. In this interaction, Clifford seems to represent the past while the Judge represents the present or future. The Judge was modeled after Hawthorne's "chief antagonist among the Salem Whigs" (Reynolds 164). This antagonist, Upham, was a progressive; thus, by extension, the Judge stands for progress, a concept which is intrinsically connected to moving forward in time. Clifford's repeated characterization as a corpse or near death show an intrinsic relationship between himself and the past, and his activities during the exchange between himself and the Judge highlight this relationship even more. In the final scene, Judge Pyncheon is hit by one of Clifford's bubbles. He looks up threateningly until he realizes he is observed. "Aha, Cousin Clifford!... Still blowing soap bubbles!" he calls (131). "Still" blowing bubbles, Clifford the old man is clinging to the pastimes of his long gone childhood. This attachment to the past shows a disconnect between Clifford and humanity, and the extent to which he holds onto the past reflects the extent to which he is seen as "mad" or eccentric to society. He is in and of the past, but his childlike enjoyment is cut off by the frightening figure of the Judge. The Judge, in the end of the chapter, pops Clifford's bubble and terrorizes him. So it seems as though progress won the fight. However, Upham was a rival, and the judge was a bad man, so the present is attached to two bad people, implying a negative judgement on the part of Hawthorne. Even beyond those associations, the Judge, progress, ends the chapter victorious, but he doesn't live to see the end of the book while the other characters, including Clifford, go off to live in a massive new house to hand down to their kids. Inheritance connotes a dependence upon the past. Progress has been killed in the book, but in his life Hawthorne *championed*

progress. He “underwrote a democratic thesis”; he was an “agitator for social reform”, “occasionally teetering on the brink of socialism” (Hall 131, 133). Here again we see the conflict within Hawthorne between the past and the future, the individual and the group.

I have made the connection between the change in narrative form and theatricality, but those two concepts and Hawthorne’s paradox of the individual versus the group are all interdependent. First, the change in form from constrained interior life to exterior views allowed Hawthorne the space to set up his theatrical stage, and that stage in turn allowed him to create points outside of the narrative itself. But there is a further connection between theater and identity: “Nathaniel Hawthorne demonstrates an interest in theatricality and its relation... the projection of individual identity” (Latham 2). There have been some critics who argue that the use of theatrical identity is represented by characters who present a facade to the world, characters who act (Latham 96). This seems counterintuitive. There are two characters in the novel who are arguably acting: the Judge, and the artist Holgrave. The Judge attempts to mask his own sins and emotions. Holgrave conceals his true identity, Holgrave *Maule*, until the end of the book. For these two, I would agree that they use a type of theater in their presentation of self; however, for the three other main characters—arguably *the* main characters—pretending or concealing themselves seems either impossible or out of character. For instance, Phoebe is a naturally honest and genuine person; it is an integral part of her character as a wholesome country girl. Clifford is too raw and accustomed to human company to have control over his presentation anymore, and the

only acting Hepzibah does is for her brother's benefit, and even that can't cover the clearest sign of her saddest and hermitted life: her own countenance. However, I do think that Hawthorne uses the theater of self-presentation in a different way, namely, he uses theater to present his own ideas, he uses it to project his individual views and his individual self. The book itself acts as an intentional concealment of some parts of him and a broadcasting of other parts. By theatrically presenting himself, he is at once being both assertive and self-conscious because the part of himself that he is showing is his own uncertainty. He teeters between committing himself to being the authorial observer looking down "from some vantage point" at the world and being a member of that world. We the readers stand witness to his struggle as it is presented in this different form.

It is clear that *The House of the Seven Gables* contains Hawthorne's attempt to either find an escape from or resolve himself to his figurative self-imprisonment (Beebe 12). The first possibility is that the story itself represents Hawthorne. Like Hawthorne's own seclusion within his own mind, his story is restricted to the House, plagued by the past and a dread about the future. "The Arched Window" seems to serve as a microcosm for the struggle not only inside of the novel, but inside of the author as well. He is searching for the way out of his own prison, that escape is his goal, so he can't be satisfied until his characters are released to join the world. Only then can he end the book. The House itself "seems detached from the world around it" (Beebe 8), much like Hawthorne felt. However, the connections between symbolized and symbol are getting confused here. It is unclear whether Hawthorne is symbolized by the narrative itself, the

characters—and which one of those—or the House. In search of an answer to this very question, Maurice Beebe wrote “the House of the Seven Gables is Hawthorne and that *The House of the Seven Gables* is the story of his escape or salvation from the curse of isolation” (12). I disagree with her on both points. At first, it seems impossible for Hawthorne to be symbolized by anything *other* than the House. He can’t be the characters because they end the novel reconnected with the world, living happily in a new House. They aren’t completely accepted, but they aren’t isolated anymore. Contrast this with Hawthorne’s experience. He is struggling to connect with the world for two reasons: he is disgusted by the average man, and he has taken it upon himself to be a reporter of the world around him, an observer rather than active participant. The first of these is at least partly resolved by Hawthorne himself: he overcomes this feeling because he feels responsible for the acts of his ancestors and so must make up for them by fighting for equality. The second could be said to be resolved by the end of the story, the end of Hawthorne’s writing it, but this wasn’t his last story; it wasn’t even his last novel, so that seems like a pretty weak escape. Even the first argument is weakened by the fact that his motives in seeking equality were suspect. He felt the need to assuage his own sense of guilt, his own pain. So, it seems highly unlikely that Hawthorne ended the novel feeling less cut off from mankind than when he started. Similarly, the narrative is resolved: it ends as the success of a love story. It’s a somewhat disjointed ending, but it certainly does end with a proverbial sunset and “The End”. If that is true, Hawthorne surely must be the House because it ends the novel just as cut-off, if not more so, abandoned by its owners, Hawthorne’s characters. That also means Beebe’s second

point isn't quite right because the story doesn't end with Hawthorne's escape or salvation. However, there is still something wrong with this view. It doesn't explain why Hawthorne's characters *are* saved, why the end of novel is, by most accounts, a happy one. I would argue that this story at its core is an expression of wish-fulfillment.

Hawthorne thought that being "separated from the great chain of human sympathy... is the worst evil that can befall man", and he wishes he could have the happy ending he gives his characters, that he could live through them (Beebe 9). For most of the novel, Clifford could serve as a stand in for many flaws of Hawthorne himself. Most obviously, Hawthorne and Clifford were both outsiders, standing above the world looking down on it. Hawthorne felt guilty about the status he had inherited from his ancestors, but he still is disgusted by the poor and the sick. In this we see Clifford's selfishness, his need for beautiful things and his disgust for ugly things. There is another, deeper insecurity which Clifford embodies for Hawthorne: he is a genius and a failure. Hawthorne spent most of his life very self-conscious of his own work. He anticipated his own failures "with a wincing laugh"; he wrote to publishers apologizing for wasting their time before they had even begun (McWilliams 3). He didn't think he had the skill to record the world in the manner it deserved. Clifford is unable to process the world around him. He is everything Hawthorne saw wrong with himself.

The fact that Clifford is not what Hawthorne liked about himself but what he didn't just serves to make the wish-fulfillment more powerful. If this worst part of himself can be saved, then he himself surely can be. However, I believe Hawthorne knew in part of himself that he wouldn't be successful in following the footsteps of his

characters. That is why the House remains a place for his doubts and his isolated self to live. That also suggests a reason for why the end of the novel has been so widely criticized (Beebe 2). It is disjointed and nonsensical. In the space of just a few pages, he moves from a corpse, to a pair of people who are near opposites getting engaged, to everyone living happily ever after in a big mansion with all their friends. Hawthorne couldn't see the way out of the dilemma he so powerfully expressed in his characters. The happy ending reads as though the person who wrote it was *trying* to write a happy ending rather than trying to write the end to the story that had been progressing up to that point. In order for Hawthorne to write a satisfactory escape from isolation of the individual within the group, he would have had to figure one out first. So, while the wish-fulfillment is poignant in its hopefulness, it is ultimately unsuccessful.

Despite Hawthorne's failure to write a good happy ending, he certainly succeeded in writing an intriguing book. He shows what it is to be an outsider and what it is to long for connection. His position as an author in the world is similar to our position as readers of his story. Readers serve as audiences to books, and authors serve as audiences to society. Being a member of an audience is at once isolating and congenial. One is cut off from the action but connected with fellow watchers. Perhaps it was this sort of connection that Hawthorne was seeking to foster by writing *The House of the Seven Gables*. He creates characters with a depth that calls to "the kindred depth" within his readers (126). His readers are isolated from the action of the novel, and they are *in* it. All of us are at once individuals and members of society; we are all mere readers and members of Hawthorne's drama. This is the relationship which Hawthorne explores



throughout “The Arched Window”: the paradoxical relationship between individuality and humanity.

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