

Reading *The House of the Seven Gables* in the Context of the Nineteenth-Century Urban Burial Reform Movement

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INTRODUCTION

On November 17th, 1847, four years before he published *The House of the Seven Gables*, Nathaniel Hawthorne commented in his journal on the burial grounds of his day:

Death Possesses a good deal of real estate—viz. the grave yards in every town. Of late years, too, he has pleasure grounds—as at Mount Auburn and elsewhere. (*The American Notebooks* 280)

Hawthorne's journal entry is dated sixteen years after Mount Auburn Cemetery was founded as the first urban garden cemetery in the United States. Mount Auburn was modeled after Père-Lachaise, established in Paris in 1803. Just as in eighteenth-century France, the rapid population growth in the cities caused by urbanization and immigration led Bostonians to restructure urban cemeteries.¹ Having initiated the garden cemetery movement, the Mount Auburn project brought about a radical change in American burial practices. In the consecration address of Mount Auburn, Joseph Story asserts: "It is painful to reflect, that the Cemeteries in our cities, crowded on all sides by the overhanging habitations of the living, are walled in only to preserve

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them from violation” (12). In crowded cities in the Northeast, the living and the dead shared limited space since the burial ground belonged to major churches located in the city center. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Holgrave Maule aptly expresses the feelings of those who lived near a burial ground inside a growing city: “Turn our eyes to what point we may, a Dead Man’s white, immitigable face encounters them, and freezes our very heart!” (183)².

Following Jane Tompkins’ assertion in *Sensational Designs* (17–18), critics have argued that the market success of *The House of the Seven Gables* was due to the sentimental formula and the happy ending, which endorsed the domestic ideology prevailing at the time.³ Hawthorne’s desperate efforts to secure “popular appreciation” by pouring “some setting sunshine” on the conclusion were rewarded by the sales of the novel on both sides of the Atlantic (*Letters* 417). His second major work caught the attention not only of literary professionals—“poets and prozers”—but also of “young ladies,” who were the major readers of the fiction of the period (*Letters* 433). Critics who relate the text to the prevailing sentimental conventions have effectively documented the influence of this dominant cultural discourse, but they often lose sight of the many-layered elements that form the core of the novel’s domestic sphere. Within the sentimental framework of the novel, the author embedded the complex problem of the relation between present and past by creating a rather bizarre domestic space, a house in which characters both living and dead coexist, unable to separate their territories, much as in the crowded cities of mid-nineteenth-century America.

Designating places for the dead was an acute problem in the growing Northeastern cities in the early nineteenth century. Historian Blanche Linden-Ward asserts that in the period, “new criteria for urban cleanliness” as well as “new definitions of the proper and respectful ways to treat the dead” emerged. “Burial reform was,” she asserts, “only one of many ways in which urbanites attempted to improve their surroundings” (149). The question of where and how to place corpses troubled urbanites by the mid-nineteenth century and led to an extensive urban cemetery reform movement. The movement incorporated other ritual changes to form a “cult of the dead” (Stannard 167).⁴ I argue that the nineteenth-century “cult of the dead,” which provided various innovative ways to deal with the dead, is as important a framework for *The House of the Seven Gables* as the cult of domesticity. Hawthorne’s text, completed in January 1851, was situated at a historical threshold when American attitudes toward death were changing dramatically. Cognitive changes in the treatment of the dead and in the concept of death itself are

crucial in interpreting the work, since, in the text, dead characters play roles as important as those taken by the living.

The novel's domestic space is inhabited by the unquiet dead, who continue to influence the Pyncheon/Maule saga. They intervene in the lives of several generations throughout history up to the novel's present day. Their intervention pervades the text with "chimney-corner legends," or "traditional lore," which connect the revenge of the dead to the present-day destiny of the living. Richard Millington associates "gossip and popular legend" with the "suppressed communal voice" that takes over the main narrative in the "Governor Pyncheon" chapter. By the death of the Judge, Millington asserts, this voice "has been freed into uninhibited expression" (143). Millington signals the importance of popular memory in the novel and finds subversive power in "traditional lore."⁵ Expressing the continual influence of the underworld in the form of traditional lore, the dead in *The House of the Seven Gables* twist the domestic sentimentalist formula, complicating the text and preventing it from becoming a monolithic love romance.

The changing attitude toward death and the dead can be understood as part of the modern rationalist effort to limit the power of supernaturalism and the fascination of its enthusiasts. This went hand in hand with the attempt to domesticate religion by bringing the supernatural into the sunny sphere of everyday activities often defined as "home" in nineteenth-century writings. Popular pseudosciences, such as mesmerism, spiritualism, and daguerreotypy, effectively employed as literary devices in *The House of the Seven Gables*, had the cultural function of promoting the separation of the magical world and the world of everyday life. Later in this paper, I analyze how Holgrave Maule, as a pseudoscientist, works as an agent for the domestication of supernatural forces, and how Phoebe Pyncheon, especially in her interaction with Holgrave, functions as an archetypal domestic angel in the novel, injecting a sunny imagery of "home" into the House contaminated by the influence of the dead. I read Hawthorne's texts, including his journal entries, together with records concerning changing burial practices in the cities and treatises on pseudosciences of the period to discuss how the containment of death and the supernatural relates to the domestic ideology prevalent at the time. Death, represented by Judge Pyncheon's dead body, and domestic bliss, the result of the union between Phoebe and Holgrave, are closely intertwined as the novel's one strange love scene symbolically shows.

The incursion of the dead into the domestic sentimentalist plot is most dramatically presented in the chapter entitled "The Flower of Eden," in which Holgrave confesses his "joy" at being alone in the House with Phoebe in the

presence of the Judge's dead body. When Phoebe suggests they "throw open the doors" to reveal the presence of the corpse inside the House, Holgrave abruptly declares his "love" for her (306). This romantic exchange between the novel's young protagonists is the sunniest moment in the text,⁶ though it takes place beside the Judge's dead body. The blissful young lovers do not worry about the grotesque presence of the body. Instead, the "image of awful Death" holds them united by its "stiffened grasp," and leads them to plan joyfully a new generation of the Pyncheon/Maule extended family (305). Charles Swann calls the scene "surely one of the oddest love scenes in fiction," as it is "the corpse of the Judge which has made the 'germs' of Holgrave's love flower" (13).

A comparative proximity between death and domestic bliss is seen in Hawthorne's notebook entry of June 15, 1838. The passage presents some observations and ideas he later used in depicting the people of Salem on Pyncheon Street and at Hepzibah's cent-shop in *The House of the Seven Gables*. On a "very hot, bright, sunny day," Hawthorne saw booths on the Common, "selling gingerbread, sugar-plums, and confectionery, spruce beer, lemonade." Among them, he noticed "a monkey, with a tail two or three feet long," having "a sort of gravity about him" (*The American Notebooks* 171).⁷ A similar monkey appears in the novel accompanying an Italian boy with his barrel organ (123–25). Hawthorne also noted that "gingerbread figures, in the shape of Jim Crow" such as we find in Hepzibah's cent-shop, were popular among the children gathered in the Common. The same day's notebook entry evoking the urban energy of a "sunny day" on the Common continues with a detailed description of "the old burial-ground" on Charter Street, located beside the house of his future wife Sophia Peabody. Hawthorne writes:

In the old burial-ground, Charter Street, a slate grave-stone, carved round the borders, to the memory of "Colonel John Hathorne, Esq.," who died in 1717. This was the witch-judge. The stone is sunk deep into the earth, and leans forward, and the grass grows very long around it; and, on account of the moss, it was rather difficult to make out the date. Other Hathornes lie buried in a range with him on either side. In a corner of the burial-ground, close under Dr. Peabody's garden fence, are the most ancient stones remaining in the grave-yard; moss-grown, deeply sunken. (*The American Notebooks* 172)

Next to the gravestone of his ancestor, "the witch-judge" John Hathorne, Hawthorne found "Dr. John Swinnerton, Physician," and "the grave of Nathaniel Mather, the younger brother of Cotton, and mentioned in the Magnalia as a hard student, and of great promise." Using the gravestones to study his

ancestral origins, Hawthorne observes that the old burial-ground “is now filled, the last being the refugee Tory, Colonel Pickman and his wife.” The “monuments” of the dead were “standing almost within arm’s reach of the side windows of the parlor” of Dr. Peabody’s residence where Sophia lived. Decaying corpses lay underneath the ground beside his fiancée’s family parlor. Hawthorne refigures this proximity of the worlds of the living and the dead, still seen in the Salem of his day, in the text of *The House of the Seven Gables*. I shall examine how this closeness between the dead and the domestic sphere is represented in a text produced at the threshold of the period in which the Northern cities of the United States faced rapid urbanization as well as an early phase of modernization.

I. SENTIMENTALIZING THE DEAD

As Hawthorne found historical importance in the gravestones at the Charter Street burial ground in Salem as “monuments” of the Puritan past, so the promoters of the garden cemetery movement emphasized the importance of commemorating the dead in order to foster a particular “sentiment” among the living in regard to their common past. Such sentiments could be utilized to form a healthy communal identity.

In the *Christian Examiner*, November 1856, H. T. Tuckerman of New York emphasized the importance of this sentiment in an article titled “The Law of Burial and the Sentiment of Death.” Tuckerman protested against the destruction of cemeteries attached to churches in the rapidly expanding New York City. Drawing on examples from Egypt and Europe, Tuckerman asserts that “the sentiment of Death—that is, the memory of the departed, the place of their sepulcher, the trophies of their worth—lures the least aspiring mind to ‘thoughts that wander through eternity,’ and promotes that association with the past which the English moralist declared essential to intellectual dignity” (339). Tuckerman argued: “Sentiment is the great conservative principle of society; those instincts of patriotism, local attachment, family affection, human sympathy, reverence for truth, age, valor, and wisdom, so often alive and conscious in the child and overlaid or perverted in the man, . . . are. . . the elements of whatever is noble, efficient, and individual in character; in every moral crisis we appeal to them, as the channels whereby we are linked to God and humanity, and through which alone we can realize just views or lawful action.” Sentiment is, according to Tuckerman, “the latent force of civil society” (341).

By cultivating such a sentiment for the dead, the living may foster a com-

mon memory of the past that lays the foundation for building a republic. In other words, the dead can function as a usable past for the living to be united as a civil community. Linden-Ward explains the garden cemetery movement with reference to the creation of a republican civilization after the Revolutionary war: the movement was a response to “the problem of defining a common, national past separate from that of the mother country.” In this way, “monuments” in a garden cemetery provided “material manifestations of a new civic religion—patriotism” (105–30).⁸

This patriotic significance of the garden cemetery movement is apparent in the efforts of the founders of the Mount Auburn Cemetery. The organizers of the project had the intention of building public monuments in the cemetery, well recognizing the importance of such edifices for fostering patriotism in commemorating the dead. In his address, “The Proposed Rural Cemetery” in 1832, Edward Everett states:

The establishment contemplated will afford the means of paying a tribute of respect, by a monumental erection, to the names and memory of great and good men, whenever or wherever they have died. Its summit may be consecrated to Washington, by a cenotaph inscribed with his name. Public sentiment will often delight in these tributes of respect, and the place may gradually become the honorary mausoleum for the distinguished sons of Massachusetts. (Everett 142)

“This design,” Everett asserts, “has touched a chord of sympathy which vibrates in every heart.” Through “an affectionate and pious care of our dead,” the living can “turn to some good account, in softening and humanizing the public feeling, that sentiment of tenderness toward the departed, which is natural and ineradicable in man.” In Everett’s argument, the cemetery serves to foster civil religious sentiment by inviting the living to “employ some of the superfluous wealth, now often expended in luxury worse than useless, in rendering the place where our beloved friends repose, decent, attractive, and grateful at once to the eye and the heart” (142–143).

Tuckerman’s article, as well as Everett’s address, testify that, in constructing this cult of the dead, mid-nineteenth-century Americans used the departed to foster “healthy” sentiments among the living—“instincts of patriotism, local attachment, family affection, human sympathy”—to form a solid civil society. By firmly locating the place for the dead in “the Place of Graves,” where the living could “solemnly muse” and “tenderly recollect” (Brazier 306), they ensured that memories of the departed were romanticized and sentimentalized. “The dead became the “Other,” allowing the living to construct a civil society based on their shared memories of ancestors. In other

words, the dead were safely domesticated, losing their supernatural power. The cult of domesticity, which invested religious passion in the home, and the cult of the dead, which limited the inscrutability of death to an intricate ritual consecration, worked together to put extraordinary feelings and experiences at a safe distance. Sentimentalist rhetoric provided the emotional framework for the living to domesticate otherwise disturbing fears of the dead, as well as passionate attachment to them. Records concerning urban burial reform show that sentimental rhetoric boosted an ideology that allowed citizens to “conserve” and “foster” the common culture of the Republic, and united them as an extended family through the power of sympathy.⁹

II. INFLUENCE OF THE DEAD ON THE LIVING IN *THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES*

The burial of the dead, or the dilemma of how to separate oneself clearly from the ancestral body on both a physical and psychic level, is precisely the problem with which the Pyncheons/Maules struggle in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Holgrave asks Phoebe: “Shall we never, never get rid of this Past?” He continues:

“It lies upon the Present like a giant’s dead body! In fact, the case is just as if a young giant were compelled to waste all his strength in carrying about the corpse of the old giant, his grandfather, who died a long while ago, and only needs to be decently buried.” (182–83)

For Holgrave this statement is figural, but for Clifford and Hepzibah it refers to a literal condition of being “slaves. . . to bygone times—to Death” in their confinement within the House of the Seven Gables.

According to “tradition,” Colonel Pyncheon built his house “over an unquiet grave,” that of Matthew Maule. The House contained “the home of the dead and buried wizard, and would thus afford the ghost of the latter a kind of privilege to haunt its new apartments, and the chambers into which future bridegrooms were to lead their brides, and where children of the Pyncheon blood were to be born” (4). Demonstrating a typically nineteenth-century concern with the hygiene of living quarters,¹⁰ the narrator uses the rhetoric of contamination to describe the influence of the dead:

The terror and ugliness of Maule’s crime, and the wretchedness of his punishment, would darken the freshly plastered walls, and *infect* them early with the scent of an old and melancholy house. . . .

But the Puritan soldier and magistrate was not a man to be turned aside from his well-considered scheme, either by dread of the wizard's ghost, or by flimsy sentimentalities of any kind, however specious. Had he been told of a *bad air*, it might have moved him somewhat; but he was ready to encounter an evil spirit on his own ground. (9, italics mine)

Alluding to “traditional lore” and “village gossip” the narrative merges folk belief in the vampiric revenge of the dead with the Pyncheon saga. The foundations of the House enclose the dead body of Matthew Maule. On the Pyncheon estate, the underworld of the dead and the living world of the Pyncheons who have succeeded them co-exist on the same soil. By creating a place where the dead and the living are destined to live in close proximity, the narrative destabilizes the clear line between the living and the dead. Thus the author establishes the ground of his romance, into which he can “mingle the Marvelous” without straining the reader's credulity. The House, then, becomes a space where phantasmagoric incidents and extraordinary events can erupt into the everyday activities of the living.

Extraordinary events caused by Maule's curse determine the history of the Pyncheons. In the Pyncheon garden, the permanent presence of Maule's well symbolizes the influence of the dead. The well is “a fountain, set round with a rim of old mossy stones, and paved, in its bed, with what appeared to be a sort of mosaic-work of variously colored pebbles.” The water from the fountain “stole away under the fence” of the Pyncheon House. Maule's influence pervades the Pyncheon family throughout the generations just as the water from the fountain runs through the ground of the House without allowing “whatever man could do to render it his own” (88).

Attracted by the images in the water, Clifford Pyncheon often hangs over Maule's well to “look at the constantly shifting phantasmagoria of figures produced by the agitation of the water over the mosaic-work of colored pebbles, at the bottom” (153–54). He finds both beautiful and threatening faces in the fountain looking “upward to him” (154). The “phantasmagoria” Clifford experiences here is an optical illusion which Phoebe perceives only as “the colored pebbles” (154).

The present day residents of the Pyncheon House, Clifford and Hepzibah, retain an ancestral aloofness, unable to give themselves to the democratic social discourse of the growing city. Both of them experience painful difficulties when crossing the threshold of the House. Even after his release from jail, Clifford sees life outside only through the arched window of the House. After regaining his numbed perceptions, he feels keenly the contrast between

the House and the changing city. Strongly affected by the mass energy of a parade on the street, Clifford attempts to throw himself into “the surging stream of human sympathies” (165). Witnessing life outside, he realizes his existential state as “a lonely being, estranged from his race” (166). To Hepzibah and Phoebe, who restrain his suicidal impulse, Clifford says: “Fear nothing. . . but had I taken that plunge, and survived it, methinks it would have made me another man” (166). The narrative voice backs up Clifford’s words:

Possibly, in some sense, Clifford may have been right. He needed a shock; or perhaps he required to take a deep, deep plunge into the ocean of human life. . . . Perhaps, again, he required nothing less than the great final remedy—death! (166)

Although living in the ancestral mansion makes her, too, a prisoner of the past, Hepzibah, joining in the city’s market activities by opening the cent shop, is several steps ahead of Clifford in the task of restoring a connection with the world outside the House. Uncle Venner says that in her childhood, Hepzibah “used to be sitting at the threshold, and looking gravely into the street” (62). By opening the cent shop, Hepzibah, although fearful, welcomes the growing city’s energy into the secluded region of her family estate. To take “down the bar from the shop door” is a symbolic step not only for Hepzibah but for the Pyncheons as they face a new phase in their family history. “Our miserable old Hepzibah” is, in fact, the very person who has brought the influence of the outer world into the House, as Dixey and his friend, representatives of the citizens, remark at the end when praising her business skills:

“. . . Old Maid Pyncheon has been in trade just about as long, and rides off in her carriage with a couple of hundred thousand—reckoning her share, and Clifford’s, and Phoebe’s—and some say twice as much! If you choose to call it luck, it is all very well; but if we are to take it as the will of Providence, why, I can’t exactly fathom it!” “Pretty good business!” (318–19)

Hepzibah is the “bold adventurer” who has renewed the business of “the long-retired and forgotten” shop “with a different set of customers.” In addition to traditional marketable goods, she displays such “modern” articles as “a glass pickle-jar, filled with fragments of Gibraltar rock” (35), “Jim Crow gingerbread,” “a party of leaden dragoons. . . in equipments and uniform of modern cut,” “some sugar figures, with no strong resemblance to the humanity of any epoch but less unsatisfactorily representing our own fashions than those of a hundred years ago,” and “a package of lucifer matches” (36). Gin-

gerbread figures soon attract the first customer, Ned Higgins, another representative of the city's plebeian life, who becomes a regular visitor to the shop.

Hepzibah also initiates the changes in the long-lasting power relationship between the Pyncheons and the Maules without realizing it, by giving one of the gables to the only remaining Maule, Holgrave. Holgrave recognizes the significance of Hepzibah's opening the cent shop in the history of the Pyncheons as "one of the fortunate days" (44). Unaware that Holgrave is a Maule, Hepzibah ruefully remarks to him: "If old Maule's ghost, or a descendant of his, could see me behind the counter to-day, he would call it the fulfillment of his worst wishes" (46). As Holgrave declares, however, the "new epoch" of the House has begun with Hepzibah slowly regaining her lost relationship with the outside world by participating fearfully but steadily in the city's market economy.

In his own way, Holgrave is also a captive of the past. As his obsessive recounting of the dead man's influence on the living shows, anxiety about the dead, represented by an overhanging "dead man's white, immitigable face," overshadows not only the Pyncheons but also the Maules. As the only remaining Maule, Holgrave is destined to pursue revenge against the Pyncheons. The text's focus has to move eventually to purging the evil past in order to conquer the continual influence of the dead on the living.

III. PSEUDOSCIENCE AND THE DOMESTICATION OF THE DEAD

The modern efforts to secure burial places outside the city walls coincide with the modernist mentality concerning the relationship between death and modernization that Jean Baudrillard outlines in his *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Baudrillard asserts that "at the very core of the 'rationality'" of our modern culture, there is "the exclusion of the dead and of death." He states:

There is an irreversible evolution from savage societies to our own: little by little, the dead cease to exist. They are thrown out of the group's symbolic circulation. They are no longer beings with a full role to play, worthy partners in exchange, and we make this obvious by exiling them further and further away from the group of the living. (126)

In our time, Baudrillard says, science has successfully defined the "irreversibility of biological death," giving it an objective and punctual character. Such a scientific and mechanical demarcation of death is, he states, specific to our modern culture (*Symbolic Exchange of Death* 125). The moderns, ac-

ording to him, “stockpile the past in plain view” in the museum or in the cemetery to “restore visible order” for our own survival (*Simulacra and Simulation* 10). This ongoing demarcation of the dead from the living is symbolic of the radical rupture between premodern and modern societies. Hawthorne’s novel shows that such a demarcation was in progress in mid-nineteenth-century America. The ancient magic, as well as the demonic power associated with death, was domesticated by modern scientific rationality. To cope with the ancient fear of the dead, various pseudosciences, precursory forms of modern scientific techniques, were employed in nineteenth-century America as well as in Europe.

Clifford’s phobic reaction to the phantasmagoric images in Maule’s well reflects the ancient fear of the dead, as we have seen. “Phantasmagoria” was a relatively new term in Hawthorne’s day; its first usage is traced to the late eighteenth century. Martin Quigley, Jr., explains that phantasmagoria “stands for a certain type of light and shadow show popular immediately after the French Revolution.” The performance was “essentially a revival of the medieval black magic or necromantic use of light and shadow to trick” the audiences. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, phantasmagoria meant the illusion created by a magic lantern (Quigley 75). In its initial use, Terry Castle says, the term was connected with “an artificially produced ‘spectral’ illusion” (29).¹¹ Such optical experiences were taken up by pseudo-scientists.

Castle observes that there was a significant transformation in human imagination in the early nineteenth century. From its initial association with something external and public, the term phantasmagoria changed in meaning and came to refer to “something wholly internal or subjective: the phantasmic imagery of the mind.” Castle uses the terms “spectralization” and “ghostifying” of mental space to mean “the absorption of ghosts into the world of thought” (29). In other words, people started to interpret the influence of death and its demonic power less physically and more psychologically. Modern psychoanalytical theory, as well as science, has provided the language for such experiences of spectral illusion. The narrator of the Pyncheon story explains that “fancy” created in Clifford’s mind “shapes of loveliness that were symbolic of his native character, and now and then a stern and dreadful shape that typified his fate” (171). The passage presents Clifford as an early-modern man, standing on the threshold of the modern age, who does not yet accept that the “illusory” ghostly vision is his own mind’s creation.

The kaleidoscopic images in Maule’s well suggest that the ability to produce phantasmagoria is connected with the Maules: “. . . the posterity of

Matthew Maule had some connection with the mystery of the looking glass, and that, by what appears to have been a sort of mesmeric process” (20–21). Alan Trachtenberg associates the kaleidoscopic images of Maule’s well with the effect of the daguerreotype (13). He also points out the functional similarity between a looking glass, one of the major tools used for magic, and the daguerreotype medium. In its function of making an image float on the surface of a silver-plated copper sheet burnished to a bright mirror effect, Trachtenberg says, the daguerreotype resembles a looking glass. Some people suspected daguerreotypists, who often appeared in black, of alchemy and necromancy (12). According to Cathy Davidson, daguerreotypy provoked popular suspicion, because it blurred “the boundaries separating science and magic” (681). Public suspicion of occult practices among daguerreotypists gradually waned but never entirely disappeared (Trachtenberg 14). The mystery surrounding the practice is felt in the novel, especially in the way Holgrave Maule’s use of this medium reveals his vulnerability.¹²

Some written records on pseudosciences in the nineteenth century show that optical illusion was a topic that captivated many people who brought to bear on it a “scientific” scrutiny. Writers on pseudosciences investigated the optical perceptions produced by daguerreotypes, magic lanterns, and crystal gazing. For example, in his *Letters on Natural Magic addressed to Sir Walter Scott. Bart.*, David Brewster, a popular pseudoscientist writer, sought to link supernatural phenomena to the accomplishments of “Modern science.” He wanted to eliminate the association of extraordinary events in nature with evil powers and to reintegrate these events into the order of nature and of Christian “Revelation.” He focused on the “most successful impositions of the ancients,” which were “of an optical nature.” He invokes the “use of plane and concave mirrors” to explain the “miracles” in ancient illusions, such as appearances of “the heathen gods” and “spectral apparitions,” referring to the development of mirrors from steel to glass and the introduction of “magic lanterns” in the seventeenth century (61).

An article by John Ware in the *Christian Examiner* associated crystal gazing with “Animal Magnetism.” Remarking that “some of our readers may be startled, and some, perhaps, displeased, to find this subject made the topic of a grave article in a journal like this,” he introduced a “recent work,” *Letters to a Candid Inquirer, on Animal Magnetism* by William Gregory, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh, “whose standing in the scientific world, whose personal character and relations in society, assure us of his honesty and his perfect belief in what he asserts” (395). Starting with the simple stage of “magnetic sleep,” Ware presents animal magnetism as includ-

ing “still more extraordinary claims of reading past events from rings, stones, and crystals; of reading the character and history of individuals from a letter, a glove, or a lock of hair; of seeing forward into the future, as well as back into the past; of breathing dreams into gloves, and sending in them healing influences over the seas; of taking away pains on the tips of one’s fingers and thus carrying them from one person to another; of entering the spiritual world, and holding intercourse with the spirits of the departed” (395). He defends the credibility of these magnetic practices, asserting: “They are not the imaginations of fools nor the illusions of monomania. They are the genuine belief of persons of the average amount of capacity and commonsense in the ordinary affairs of life; persons honest, and, morally speaking, trustworthy” (431–32). In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Holgrave’s occupation as a pseudoscientist has as its frame of reference this social context in which magic and science have not yet been separated into two distinct categories. Pseudoscientists were struggling to eliminate the sinister associations of their abilities just as Holgrave in the novel cautiously changes the meaning attributed to his hereditary “evil eye.”

In the nineteenth-century social context, both daguerreotypist and mesmerist were considered to be descendants of ancient practitioners of magic. Holgrave associates the Maules’ mesmeric power with their ancestors’ practice of witchcraft. In the historical romance he writes for a popular magazine, Holgrave says that the special ability Matthew Maule inherited was called by their neighbors “the witchcraft of Maule’s eye,” which not only “could look into people’s minds” but also “could draw people into his own mind, or send them, if he pleased, to do errands to his grandfather, in the spiritual world” (189–190). In other words, Maule’s power relates to the ability to cross the threshold between the living and the dead. Still disguising his identity as a Maule, he says to Phoebe that he is “somewhat of a mystic” and the “tendency” is in his blood “together with the faculty of mesmerism, which might have” sent him to “Gallows Hill, in the good old times of witchcraft” (217).

The special ability the Maules possess is an enigmatic power difficult to judge ethically as either good or bad. In an article in the *Christian Examiner* titled “Modern Spiritualism,” the Reverend Thomas Hill showed how to judge the ability to communicate with the world of the dead. Hill traces the history of “spirit-rapping,” or spiritulist communication with the dead, to witchcraft practice in Europe. He asserts that “there were indeed many periods when these nervous states of disease became epidemic, or produced epidemic monomanias, in precisely the same manner in which the Salem witchcraft was epidemic, or the modern spirit-rapping is epidemic” (Hill 368). Hill

associates such “epidemic monomanias accompanying the manifestations of peculiar powers” with “the Anabaptists” after the Reformation, “the Quakers of Pennsylvania,” and Emanuel Swedenborg who “had constant visions of heavenly things, a foreknowledge of the future, and special revelations and communications with spirits” (368–69). According to Hill, the ancient practitioners of magic survived throughout history by changing their public personae from witches to religious enthusiasts and visionaries, thus gradually casting off their association with the demonic. Holgrave’s mesmerist practice is one of these enigmatic abilities that can be interpreted as a manifestation of either evil or good.

The enigmatic characteristics of his pseudoscientific ability and occupation give Holgrave an ambivalent status in the novel. Some critics have expressed the suspicion that Holgrave is involved in a scheme to gain the fortune of the Pyncheons by murdering the Judge.¹³ The narrative, however, undermines the plausibility of his active participation in any homicide by presenting Holgrave as a trustworthy young man who has “never violated the innermost man” and has “carried his conscience along with him” (177).

Holgrave demonstrates his enigmatic power of mesmerism over Phoebe while he reads the story of Alice Pyncheon. While listening, Phoebe almost falls into a trance “in which she could behold only him, and live only in his thoughts and emotions,” just like Alice when under the power of Matthew Maule (212). This incident, together with Holgrave’s exertion of mesmerism on the Pyncheon Chanticleer (176–77), suggests that Holgrave has the power to control the destiny of the Pyncheons if he wishes. Having obtained one of the gables in the Pyncheon House, Holgrave possesses a “panoptical” position (Foucault 195–228) from which to survey the movements of the Pyncheons. Becoming close to Phoebe in their frequent “kindly intercourse” inside the Pyncheon estate, Holgrave can collect first hand information concerning Clifford (173–86). He also has ample time to study Judge Pyncheon in their meeting to take the Judge’s daguerreotype picture for the political campaign.

As his authorship of the legend of Alice shows, Holgrave is the only character in *The House of the Seven Gables* who possesses full knowledge of the past. He is aware not only of the Pyncheons’ greed, but also the Maules’ hereditary monomaniacal stubbornness. He concludes that this trait in Matthew Maule drove Maule to become “the darkest and woefulest man that ever walked behind a corpse” at the funeral of Alice (210). Rejecting his ancestor’s stubborn adherence to vengeance against the Pyncheons, Holgrave redirects his potentially destructive powers toward a positive purpose. Just as

ancient magic had gradually exchanged negative for more positive connotations in its transition to pseudoscience, Holgrave redirects his hereditary power to the socially acceptable practice of marriage. Unlike Clifford, hemmed in by memories and ancient fears, as a pseudoscientist, Holgrave is capable of utilizing his family's past within the framework of modern cognition.

The curse on the Pyncheons in the present period of the novel is transferred not to Clifford Pyncheon, who has received his due share of misfortune in "a living tomb" (238), or to Hepzibah, who has devoted her life to her brother and shared his unhappy destiny, but to Judge Pyncheon, who single-mindedly pursues the acquisition of the Pyncheon estate. The Judge is the present manifestation of the dead ancestor Colonel Pyncheon. The Judge's body is not enclosed within itself but figuratively extends back to the ancestral body of the Colonel. Phoebe fantasized when she first met the Judge that "the original Puritan, of whom she had heard so many somber traditions—the progenitor of the whole race of New England Pyncheons, the founder of the House of the Seven Gables, and who had died so strangely in it—had now stepped into the shop" (120). In Phoebe's fancy, the Judge appears "very much like a serpent, which, as a preliminary to fascination, is said to *fill the air with his peculiar odor*" (119, *italics mine*). Note here the rhetoric of contamination used to describe the influence of the dead on the House.

The death of the Judge, then, means the end of the feud between the Pyncheons and the Maules of the past. What is curious in the scene confirming the Judge's death, however, is that Holgrave does not let Phoebe directly witness the dead body although both of them are in its close proximity. Holgrave, instead, uses a daguerreotype image to persuade Phoebe of the Judge's death, as it is evidently "represented" in the picture. Holgrave simply says to Phoebe: ". . . I used the means at my disposal to preserve this pictorial record of Judge Pyncheon's death" (303). Through a modern scientific medium, daguerreotypy, the Judge's death is mechanically presented as an objective fact. Accepting the fact printed in the daguerreotype photo as an authentic "record," Phoebe does not go to the next room to confirm the Judge's death. Represented as an objective image, the corpse in the photo does not possess the ancient power to oppress the living. The daguerreotype medium mechanically renders the terminal and powerless state of its object. Death, contained in a pictorial image, can be safely circumscribed and thereby deprived of its demonic power. Since, presumably, a mere image of death will not threaten the living, the modern scientific tool can contain and domesticate death.

IV. LEAVING THE DEAD IN THE GARDEN

Swallowing the Judge's dead body as the last corpse inside it, the "lonely mansion" finally separates itself from "a living world" (283). Merging its "venerable edifice" with the surrounding nature, the House's external appearance presents "an inviting aspect" to a beholder (285). The House turns into a resting place for the dead as its "windows gleamed cheerfully in the slanting sunlight." The "golden branch" of the Pyncheon Elm and "Alice's Posies" in the angle between the two front gables with their "mystic expressions" show that "something within the house was consummated" (286). The "golden branch [bough]" which is associated with the descent of Aeneas into Hades, also, according to ancient funeral custom, announces the presence of the corpse inside the house.¹⁴

The next two chapter titles, "Alice's Posies" and "The Flower of Eden," coming after the chapter with the detailed description of Judge Pyncheon's dead body, not only continue the "death-renewal-fertility" thematic, but also show that the House is now turning into a place similar to the garden cemetery. In the American urban cemetery reform movement, unlike in French and British cemeteries, there was greater emphasis on nature than on artistic monuments. The "American cemetery," Ariès says, "evolved toward nature and away from art" (*The Hour of Our Death* 532). In becoming similar to a garden cemetery, the House becomes a place of proper burial. Thus Holgrave's anxiety about "his grandfather, who died a long while ago, and only needs to be decently buried" is lifted.

Towards the end of the novel, the living Pyncheons and Holgrave Maule are presented in the powerful rhetoric of domestic ideology. Phoebe, an archetypal domestic angel, takes the initiative in the novel's final chapter. To her future husband, Holgrave, "the wild reformer" now changed into "a conservative," she says, "how wonderfully your ideas are changed" (314-15). Holgrave once fancied that "he could look through Phoebe, and all around her, and could read her off like a page of a child's story-book." The narrator, however, immediately pointed out his misreading of Phoebe's character: "these transparent natures are often deceptive in their depth; those pebbles at the bottom of the fountain are farther from us than we think" (182).

Phoebe, from the beginning of the story, is continually presented as a woman who possesses "a kind of natural magic that enables these favored ones to bring out the hidden capabilities of things around them" (71). It is not Holgrave but Phoebe who sets the course of their future, namely, to have "a house and a moderate garden-spot" of their own (118). Phoebe's domestic

magic succeeds in transforming Holgrave from a political radical who threatens social institutions into a solid, responsible citizen of the Republic who dreams of living in a house “in stone, rather than in wood” (314). Having consummated his role as the only surviving Maule in the novel’s revenge plot, Holgrave now fully renders himself up to the domestic sentimentalist plot and becomes a conservative citizen. The narrative of the story of the House, however, does not end with this happy departure of the present-day Pyncheon/Maule extended family.

As I have shown, the creation of garden cemeteries outside a city’s residential quarter was the nineteenth-century way of circumscribing death. “Nature,” in the garden cemetery, is not wild and untamed but contained and domesticated. Allocating a designated place for the dead, the living demarcated the territory of the dead and death safely outside the city walls so as not to be threatened by the influence of the dead. This control over the dead is only partly effective in *The House of the Seven Gables*, for the House that is turning into a burial place remains in the center of the growing city on Pyncheon Street.

Borrowing the popular form of sentimental domestic literature as an external framework, Hawthorne fuses with it discourses from “traditional lore” in the form of “village gossip” and the “chimney corner legend” concerning the memories of the dead. Creating a bizarre domestic space in which underworld elements constantly destabilize the everyday life-world of the living, Hawthorne’s text reveals the psychological thresholds mid-nineteenth-century individuals had to cross as they tried to demarcate the enigmatic world of wonder, the residue of the premodern, from the sunny sphere of the everyday world. Hawthorne’s text is culturally conditioned; it allows nineteenth-century popular discourse, embodied in such cultural constructions as the cult of domesticity and the cult of the dead, to combine with a historical revenge story taken from the tradition of the past. Beneath the seemingly happy ending of the newly emerged Pyncheon/Maule family, destined to plant a reproduction-centered family in the suburbs (Davidson 695–96), Hawthorne’s text leaves the enigmatic world of the House of the Seven Gables as the House becomes a garden similar to a naturally ornamented rural cemetery, the exclusive territory for the dead, in the city’s center. “Maule’s well,” now “in solitude” in the garden, keeps producing its bubbling prophecies as “a succession of kaleidoscopic pictures, in which a gifted eye might have seen fore-shadowed the coming fortunes” of the Pyncheon/Maule family. “The Pyncheon-elm” whispers “unintelligible prophecies,” although there is no mortal soul to listen (319). The narrative evokes a magical space occupied

by the dead, with no living inhabitants able to witness it, placed in the middle of the rapidly growing city as if to suggest that residues of premodern supernatural beliefs survive through the imperative sunny ending imposed by the novel's domestic-sentimentalist convention. The conclusion is open to the possibility of other tales of wonder to be told within the city walls.

NOTES

¹ In 1815, almost one-half of the total U.S. population of 8,400,000 resided in the Northeast. New York and Philadelphia had populations in excess of 100,000. Boston and Baltimore had in excess of 35,000; Salem, Albany and Providence all had 10,000 (North 60).

² All citations from *The House of the Seven Gables*, identified by page numbers in the text, refer to the *Centenary Edition*.

³ Herbert Ross Brown calls the period between 1820 and 1860, the "Sentimental Years," stating that "the sentimental formula was a simple equation resting upon a belief in the spontaneous goodness and benevolence of man's original instincts." Domestic novelists often used this sentimental formula to teach faith in natural virtue and in virtuous simplicity while emphasizing the joys of family life as the highest value (176–324). I follow Brown's definition in this paper. Baym distinguishes the domestic novel from the sentimental novel, referring to its specific subject matter, setting, and style (204). For a detailed discussion on the relation between domestic ideology and *Seven Gables*, see Gillian Brown or Millington 63–132.

⁴ For the "cult of the dead," I am indebted to the ideas of Ariès and Stannard. Ariès calls the period "the age of the beautiful death." He says that the "nineteenth century is the era of mourning which the psychologist of today calls hysterical mourning" (56). Stannard calls the nineteenth-century American attitude toward death "the cults of the dead." He explains: "It is this period that witnessed the emergence of cults of the dead, of mourning pictures, of prolonged periods of seclusion for the bereaved, of the 'rural cemetery' movement." He says that "the romanticisation and sentimentalization of death" characterize the nineteenth-century American attitude (16–168). See also Ann Douglas 200–26.

⁵ Mizruchi also asserts the importance of the "chimney-corner legends" as "an essential key to the political insights of *Seven Gables*" and finds a subversive power in the "collective vision" of the "popular perceptions" which come into the text as part of the oral tradition (134).

⁶ In a letter to Fields on November 29, 1850, Hawthorne wrote about the concluding part of *Seven Gables*: "I shall probably get this book off my hands in two or three weeks. It darkens damnably towards the close, but I shall try hard to pour some setting sunshine over it" (*The Letters* 376).

⁷ Another passage on a similar scene, a monkey with "a tremendously thick tail" accompanying a barrel-organ grinder, is found in the entry for October 11, 1845 (*The American Notebooks* 271).

⁸ Similar arguments are seen in the "Introduction" of Sacvan Bercovitch's *The Office of The Scarlet Letter*. Bercovitch argues that "Hawthorne and his contemporaries traced" the "cultural genealogy" of America "to Puritan New England" to establish a new national identity (xiv-xv).

⁹ Shirley Samuels argues for the dynamism of the culture of sentiment, asserting that "in nineteenth-century America sentimentality appears as a national project: in particular, a project about imagining the nation's bodies and the national body" (Introduction 3).

¹⁰ Mary Douglas asserts: "The nineteenth century saw in primitive religions two peculiari-

ties which separated them as a block from the great religions of the world. One was that they were inspired by fear, the other that they were inextricably confused with defilement and hygiene" (1). Douglas points out the frequency of such depiction in the nineteenth-century missionary's or traveler's account of primitive religion.

¹¹ Concerning the relation between phantasmagoria or "ghost-shows" and Victorian literature, refer also to Nina Auerbach.

¹² See also, Trachtenberg, "Seeing and Believing: Hawthorne's Reflections on the Daguerreotype in *The House of the Seven Gables*."

¹³ Von Abele suspects that Holgrave's marriage to Phoebe is in order to gain access to the Pyncheon fortune (395). Cox furthers this suspicion and sees Holgrave's inherent supernatural power as the cause of Judge Pyncheon's death (101).

¹⁴ See Brazer 281–84. According to Frazer, the Golden Bough, which Aeneas carries with him on his descent into the subterranean world, is the mistletoe which in many cultures works as a protection against witches and trolls (812–23).

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