
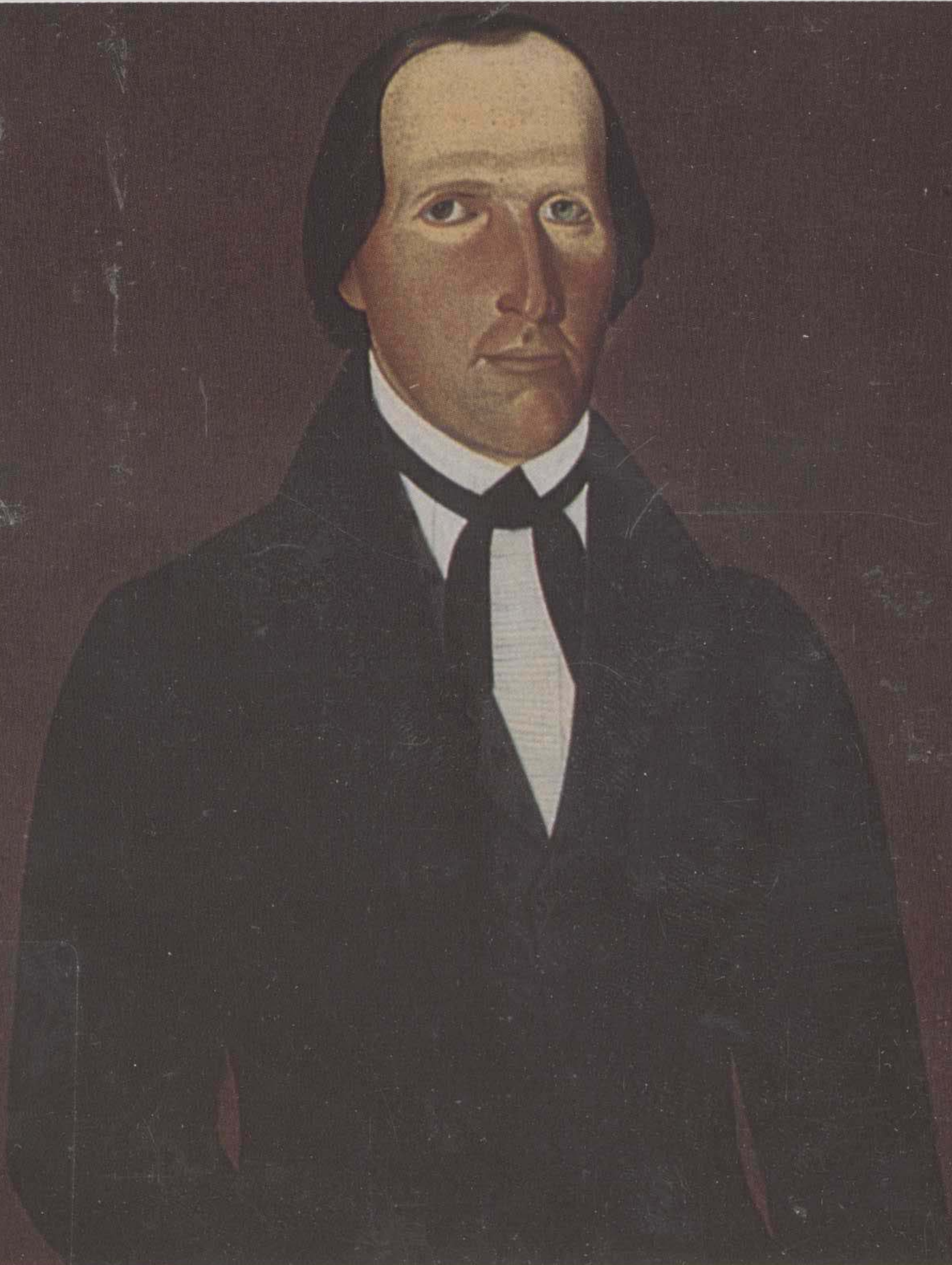


PENGUIN  CLASSICS

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

THE HOUSE OF
THE SEVEN GABLES



THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

BY

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

EDITED WITH
AN INTRODUCTION BY
MILTON R. STERN



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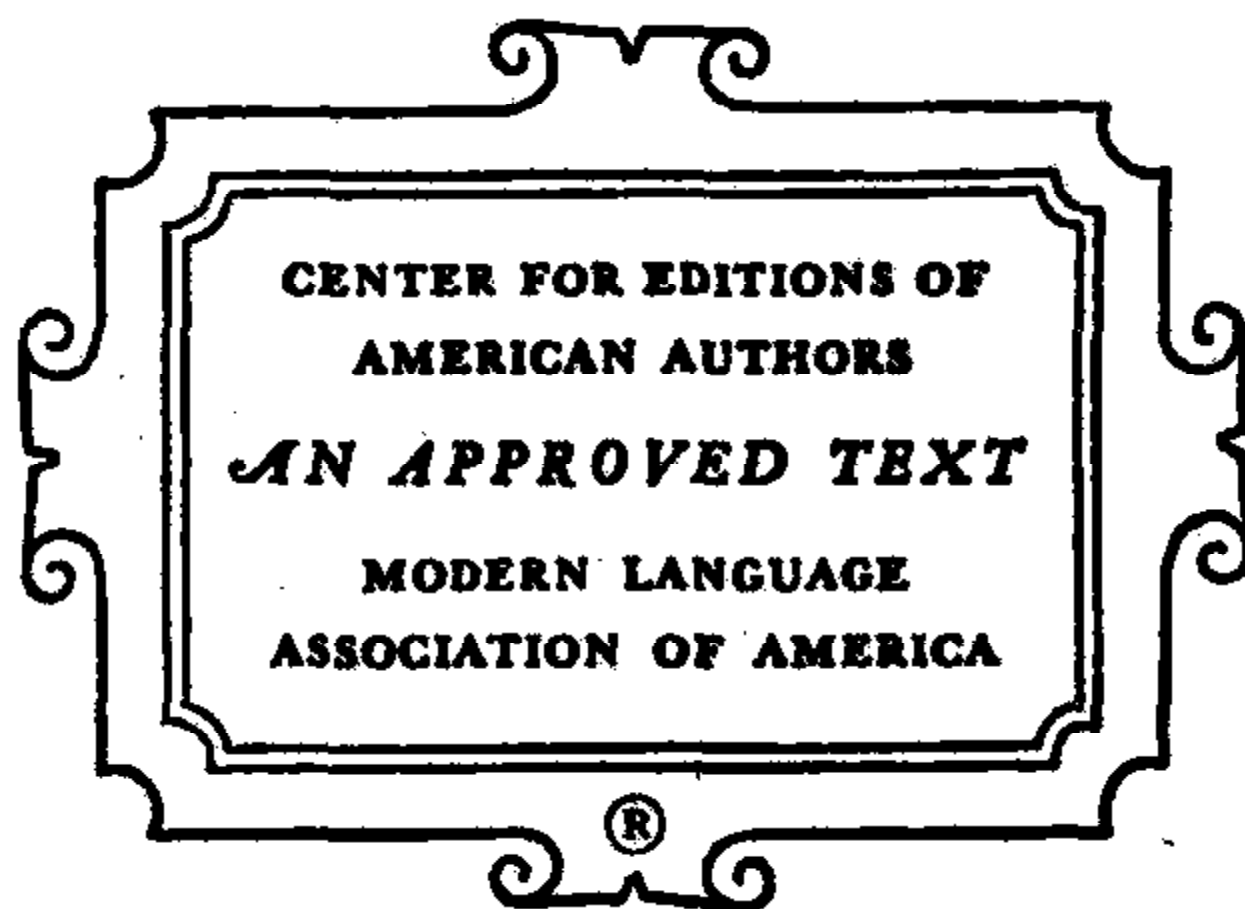
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THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) was born in Salem, Massachusetts, where, after his graduation from Bowdoin College in Maine, he wrote the bulk of his masterful tales of American colonial history, many of which were collected in his *Twice-told Tales* (1837). In 1839 and 1840 Hawthorne worked in the Boston Customs House, then spent most of 1841 at the experimental community of Brook Farm. After his marriage to Sophia Peabody, he settled in the “Old Manse” in Concord; there, between 1842 and 1845, he wrote most of the tales gathered in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846). His career as a novelist began with *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), whose famous preface recalls his 1846–1849 service in “The Custom-House” of Salem. *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) followed in rapid succession. After a third political appointment—this time as American Consul in Liverpool, England, from 1853 to 1857—Hawthorne’s life was marked by the publication of *The Marble Faun* (1860) but also by a sad inability to complete several more long romances. Ill health, apparently, and possibly some failure of literary faith finally eroded Hawthorne’s ability to make imaginative sense of America’s distinctive moral experience.

Milton R. Stern is Distinguished Alumni Professor at the University of Connecticut. His articles have appeared in various journals and collections of essays; he is the editor of *Discussions of Moby-Dick, Typee and Billy Budd* and the four-volume Viking Portable Library *American Literature Survey* (with Seymour L. Gross), published by Penguin Books. He is the author of *The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville* and *The Golden Moment: The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*.

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INTRODUCTION

The House of the Seven Gables is curiously divorced from the values and psyche of the 1840s out of which it grew (Hawthorne began the book on March 6, 1850, and completed it on January 27, 1851), and yet at the same time it is deep in the ambience of Hawthorne's historical moment. F. O. Matthiessen summed up what all commentators since 1851 have agreed upon when he observed that *The House of the Seven Gables* is the "nearest approach to everyday contemporary life" in all of Hawthorne's romances. As such, the book retains its place in the mainstream of American literature and illuminates Hawthorne's use of his source materials, a use that reveals his uneasy—but certain—repudiation of some of the most accepted shibboleths of his time.

The most basic, pervasive, hackneyed, productive, and oversimplified commonplace in the entire repertoire of assumptions permeating American life and literature is the notion of the New World as the fulfillment of the dreams and longings that have characterized Western civilization. Christians, especially the Protestant fundamentalists who settled New England, saw America as a type of the City of God. America is God's Country and Americans are His Chosen People. The seventeenth-century Puritan penchant for Old Testament names was but one reflection of the cer-

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tainty that the pioneering dissenters from the Old World were the latter-day Israelites, building the New Canaan, the New Jerusalem, the City on the Hill. Edward Johnson, in a famous and representative history with the symptomatic title of *The Wonder Working Providences of Sion's Savior in New England* (1654), was jubilant, for instance, about a plague that almost wiped out the Indians because he saw it as a "providence," a miraculous portent of divine intervention signaling the removal of Satan's children from the land in order that it might be physically and morally cleared for the spiritually sanitizing advent of God's Elect.

The intermixture of religious and patriotic identity in society's circumambient sense of special national destiny was not lost in the nineteenth century on Nathaniel Hawthorne of Salem, whose great-great-grandfather, John Hathorne, was one of the sternest of the hanging judges during the witch-hunt hysteria of 1692. In nineteenth-century Salem, not to believe patriotically in the exclusive and commercial providence of America's special and transcendent destiny, new in all of history, was not only to deny national identity but was also to be somehow atheistic, wicked, or, at the very least, un-Christian. Such disbelief would seem to set one against the tide of democratic progress and make one socially questionable. Although Hawthorne's contemporaries did not accuse over four hundred people and four dogs of witchcraft, as did their Puritan ancestors, the righteous assurances and certainties of the older generations had been transmitted in Salem's close-minded, close-fisted, materialistic Yankee "nearness" and invincible optimism, from which Hawthorne recoiled. In *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne's recoil is indicated in grim centerpieces like the character of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon and in amused asides about the bargain-loving children who buy gingerbread or who listen to organ-grinders.

Americans are so used to the magic word "New" before

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Old Country place-names like Hampshire, England, Jersey, and York that the labels no longer carry the political and psychological freight they once brought to Emerson's Young America, in which Hawthorne took his place. (It is helpful to remember that Hawthorne was already sentient and aware—he was eight years old—when the War of 1812 broke out and that he was twenty-one when the Era of Good Feeling came to its close.) But the insistence on youth and newness on all sides—in the noble sense of spiritual possibility announced by American Transcendentalism and in the exploitative sense of economic and political possibility celebrated by the burgeoning Jacksonian democracy, both of which came into blossom in the 1830s—made an inescapable din in the ears of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

On the one hand, Hawthorne wished to withdraw from the tumult of joyfully proclaimed progress. Everything he wrote implied his disbelief in a revolutionary change in human nature and human prospects, and some pieces, like "Earth's Holocaust," proclaimed that disbelief explicitly. On the other hand, he grew tired of the "ghosts," as he called them, the fictional characters who haunted his mind in a nightscape in which was enacted his sense of a universal human brotherhood held in inescapable bondage to ubiquitous human limitation. He longed to join the cheerful, "commonplace prosperity in broad and simple daylight" as he called it in the Preface to *The Marble Faun*, of "my dear native land." His fiction—and *The House of the Seven Gables* is no exception—is filled with oppositions and contrasts between sunlight and moonlight, daylight and shadow. Sunlight is either the hard, clear light of the practical, ruthless, methodical, and insatiable world of facts, business, and politics (Judge Pyncheon's sultry, dog-days smile, for instance), or it is the cheerful, redeeming light of the practical and domestic world of facts and common, daily life. (Phoebe, for example, is constantly referred to as "a sunbeam," or "sunny." Hawthorne knew that the Greek

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word *phoibos*—radiant, shining—provided a name not only for the moon goddess, Artemis, but also for the Apollo Phoebus, god of the sun.) In Hawthorne's writings the world of sun and day is the world of society and practicality, redemptive in some instances, destructive in others. Moonlight or shadow is the atmosphere of the invisible world of evil, of the past, of the hidden recesses of the heart (the house of the seven gables itself is characterized as a heart); or it is the world of artistic creation, which isolates the artist from society (while Holgrave is an artist exploring the Maule and Pyncheon past, he lives in the shadowy old house). In Hawthorne's writings the twilight world is the world of the seeking imagination, redemptive in some instances, destructive in others. Deep within himself, in what he called a "twilight atmosphere," Hawthorne repudiated the most cherished and pervasive noonday assumptions of a society that—also deep within himself—he hungrily wished to join as a respectable, representative, Sun-day burgher. His self as citizen was in constant tension with his self as artist, and *The House of the Seven Gables* is the book, more than any other, that thematically represents the moment of ascendancy of the noonday world in Hawthorne. The redemptive force of bright sunshine wins the day—and the night.

Without too much forcing, one can see Hawthorne's life as a rhythm of opposing impulses, alternations of the need for daylight membership in society's public world and of the need for withdrawal into the twilight of brooding reflection on the meanings of that world. He was born into a day that certainly was public enough: the Fourth of July, 1804; into a society that certainly was conventional enough: Salem, Massachusetts; and into a family that certainly was established enough in that society: the Hathornes of old Puritan stock. The identity implicit in his heritage alternated with dreamy boyhood excursions to his mother's family, up-country in Maine. In 1821 he entered a respectable college, Bowdoin,

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where he received a respectable education and, in 1825, a respectable degree. He reached out toward public fame with his first novel, *Fanshawe*, in 1828. But then, ashamed of that rather embarrassing first work, he retreated into silence, tried to suppress the book, and destroyed as many copies as he could. He even denied authorship.

There followed twelve years of literary apprenticeship back home with his mother, in Salem. These years were, again, alternations between reflective seclusion in his room, conjuring fictions and their morals in his mind, and attempts to become a public voice, an accepted and successful writer. He published occasional pieces in the *Salem Gazette*, in the *Token*, and in other periodicals, collecting some of them in 1837 as *Twice-Told Tales*. Then more withdrawal and writing and then a public year, 1839-40, as a Democratic appointee in the Boston Custom House. In 1841 he spent seven months at Brook Farm, and then, in 1842, he married his most beloved representative of the respectable community, Sophia Peabody. He took his bride, a revered presence of society and propriety, with him to Concord, where he retired into writing for four years of happy and relative seclusion at the Old Manse, Ralph Waldo Emerson's ancestral home. (He published *Mosses from an Old Manse* in 1846.) But in that year, once more as a Democratic appointee to a Custom House position, he moved back to the public world of Salem, this time to stay for three years. In 1850 he withdrew again for a year to a house near Lenox in the Berkshire hills, where he wrote *The House of the Seven Gables*. For yet another year he enjoyed his private identity with his family when he moved back to Concord, to the Wayside house, in 1852. But as public and political man, in the following year he accepted an appointment to the United States Consulship in Liverpool (he was a classmate and friend of President Franklin Pierce, whose campaign biography he had written in 1852), where he remained for the next four years. From

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1858 to 1860 he and his family traveled through France and Italy. They returned home to the Wayside in 1860, where Hawthorne remained until he met his death on a walking and carriage tour in New Hampshire with Franklin Pierce.

Biographers quarrel mildly about whether Hawthorne's seclusiveness was a legend and tend to want to make him either a dreamy recluse or a stout man of the world. He was both. The alternations of identity suggested here were, in fact, not so much alternations as energies both active at the same time. He created the twilight *Scarlet Letter* (1850) in his imagination while he was working at the daylight Salem Custom House. It is also true that comparative seclusion at Lenox and Concord produced very "public" books, such as *The House of the Seven Gables*, *True Stories from History and Biography* (1851), *The Life of Franklin Pierce* (1852), and stories for children (*A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* in 1852 and *Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys* in 1853), as well as the great works of his imagination, *The Snow Image and Other Twice-Told Tales* (1852) and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852). It is not too much to say that it seems clear that the generating force behind Hawthorne's creative activity was the tension between his public, noonday self and his private, twilight self, for he literally spent his life in the attempt, through fiction, to "open an intercourse" between them.

The history of American literature is in part a continuation of the conflict Hawthorne suffered; it is a history of the tensions between the various versions of success or transcendence that have accumulated under the catchall rubric of "The American Dream" on the one hand, and the disenchanted examination of that dream in serious American literature on the other. From Edward Johnson and his pro-American God onward, American literature is filled with tales of seekers who expect to realize the dream of an existence that transcends the limitations of ordinary mortals. Often the

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expectation is expressed in and by enormous wealth. Usually the expectation is expressed as a legacy—historical, psychological, and, often, literal. Consequently, one of the recurrent motifs in American literature is the idea of the American claimant, someone who expects to inherit undisturbed a great promise from the past, like Melville's *Pierre*, or who expects to find his own place in that promise by regaining a lost past or legacy, like Melville's *Redburn*. Like Twain's Colonel Sellers, the claimant thinks that he is just entering the broad avenue to wealth which will buy an enlarged condition of being, a fulfillment of all the yearnings and memories and possibilities of desire. So, very early in American fiction James Fenimore Cooper chronicled a conflict between two legacies of the land. One is a legacy of land as property, the other a legacy of nature as morality. Cooper's vision of the relationship of the two has much more complexity than is usually credited to him, but in all the complexities, Cooper's people, whether Ishmael Bush of *The Prairie* or the aristocrats of *Home as Found* and *The Littlepage Manuscripts*, come to understand the necessity and inevitability of a sense of limitation that is denied by the loud voices of progress raised on all sides in the new democracy.

In the context of this theme, it is but a step from Cooper's people to Henry James's Christopher Newman, to Mark Twain's American Claimant (there are some startling similarities between Hawthorne and Twain, from the fact of their parents' lost family legacies to the fact that the three unfinished manuscripts Hawthorne left at the time of his death in 1864 are tales of American claimants), to Theodore Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths and Sister Carrie, to William Faulkner's Sutpen, and—the most popular archetypal figure of them all—F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, whose story concludes with the familiar lines that sum up America's national seeking for "the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will

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run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning——.”

In the early- and mid-nineteenth century Hawthorne fixed sunlit Salem in his own twilight imagination. So too, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the poet, Edwin Arlington Robinson, fixed his own hometown, Gardiner, Maine, whose eponymous inhabitant, Robert Gardiner, played a part in Hawthorne's vision of things. Robinson's masterful and compact spiritual vignettes portray in Maine the same Yankee characters that Hawthorne had seen all about him in Salem. The joyless materialism of "Tilbury Town," which is what Robinson called Gardiner, where his own "Children of the Night" lived, was Robinson's poetic continuation of what Hawthorne had seen as a conflict between fact and imagination, materialism and art, commerce and soul. But there is more than a literary connection between Hawthorne's Massachusetts and Robinson's Maine, and that connection completes Fitzgerald's famous concluding lines: "so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

In the summer of 1837, in a visit to Gardiner, Hawthorne brooded about the empty, ruined, pretentious mansion of Robert Halowell Gardiner, and he wrote in his notebook a July 11 entry reflecting upon great mansions in America as a sign of destructive burden visited upon the descendants by the pride of the ancestors. "This subject," Hawthorne noted, "offers hints of copious reflection, in reference to the indulgence of aristocratic pomp among democratic institutions." The theme of a democratic and common oneness, a mortal bond of brotherhood versus an isolating and aristocratic pride, is another pervasive element of Hawthorne's fiction, to be found in all his romances and many of his tales. It is central to *The House of the Seven Gables*, and, as we shall see when we consider the ending of the romance, it creates further complicating tensions for Hawthorne. The problem

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was that the clearest metaphor for Hawthorne's metaphysical sense of universal democracy was the political democracy of the American republic. But it was precisely the excess and thoughtlessness of *that* noonday world that propelled Hawthorne further into his shadowy—and isolating—twilight world of creative imagination. Nevertheless, Hawthorne clung for dear life to the idea of democracy as the redemptive spirit of cooperative, mutual human affections in the universal workaday world of common folk, and just as he saw everywhere the conflict between democracy and pride, so he opted in his fictions for the moral triumph of integration into the common world.

In an 1832 journey through the White Mountains, Hawthorne came upon materials for a twice-told tale he called "The Great Carbuncle," in which the valley of the Saco river near the Maine border becomes the locale for a search for a wondrous gem that represents the absolute. The seeking claimants include a materialistic and "weighty" Boston merchant, Ichabod Pignort, and a bejeweled lord who spends "much of his time in the burial vault of his dead progenitors, rummaging their mouldy coffins in search of all the earthly pride and vainglory that was hidden among bones and dust; so that besides his own share he had the collected haughtiness of his whole line of ancestry." These two, who make up a composite of the line of descent from Colonel Pyncheon to Jaffrey Pyncheon, come, like them, to grief in their lust for high station. No seeker succeeds in claiming the great carbuncle, of course, and the survivors of the quest, a young newlywed couple, prefiguring Phoebe and Holgrave, wisely repudiate the search and settle democratically for a common, limited fate with the rest of mankind.

The battle between common mortality and prideful transcendence goes back for Hawthorne to Adam and Eve. In Hawthorne's imagination the sources for *The House of the Seven Gables* go farther back than 1837 and 1832. In his

torical time, in the 1620s, King James I had awarded a patent for almost two thousand square miles between the Muscongus and Penobscot rivers, a stretch of land that was to become Knox, Lincoln, and Waldo counties in Maine, right next door to what was to become Gardiner. General Samuel Waldo oversaw the holdings so successfully that the proprietors who had hired him deeded him nine hundred square miles, approximately half the territory. After Waldo died in 1759, three-fifths of the Waldo Patent passed through inheritance, marriage, confiscation, and purchase into the hands of Henry Knox, whose ownership was established by state law as early as 1785. Like Colonel Pyncheon, Knox built his mansion, "Montpelier," over the gravesite of some of those who were dispossessed. His wife, Lucy, brought the first harpsichord into the region, and like Alice Pyncheon, delighted listeners with her music as much as she antagonized her neighbors with her hauteur. Yet, by the time Knox died in 1806, his estate, like Robert Gardiner's, was shrunken by debts, and his son, poor and incapacitated by his early luxuriousness, did not prosper. On August 6, 1837, Hawthorne visited "Montpelier" in Thomaston, and six days later he entered in his notebook this observation: "The house and its vicinity, and the whole tract covered by Knox's Patent, may be taken as an illustration of what must be the result of American schemes of aristocracy."

The illusory ideas of the American claimant, symbolized in a ruined, great house, were intricately interwoven between Salem and Maine geographically and between democracy and aristocracy politically in the imagination with which Hawthorne absorbed his source materials. And those materials came very close to home. Hawthorne entered in his notebook the speculation that Robert Gardiner's mansion "is likely to be known by the name of Gardiner's Folly, for centuries to come"; he was also aware of the edifice of his very own mother's brother, Robert Manning. Hawthorne's son-in-

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law, George Lathrop, noted that the Manning house was "so ambitious that it gained the title of 'Manning's Folly.'" Hawthorne's maternal grandfather had owned thousands of acres in Maine, and the Manning family hoped to recoup a lost fortune by recovering title to the land. Hawthorne himself attached dreams of bliss to that ownership, for during his visits in young childhood, and in 1818 when his widowed mother moved the family to Robert's huge house on Sebago Lake, near Raymond, the young Nathaniel experienced the happiest times of his boyhood. He hated his lonely return to Salem for schooling and learned early both the overpowering energy of the desire to regain lost bliss and also the illusory quality of that dream. Probably from the time he was fourteen, in his visions, huge old houses, Salem, land in Maine, pretentious pride, the happy confraternity of humans, and beckoning legacies began to form an amalgam of repetitive and inescapable hope and gloom, loss and salvation, as a condition of human history itself. It was a condition that created a desperate need for sunshiny cheer in the dark necessities in which all human lives are caught.

The Manning lands, like the fictitious Pyncheon lands, had been deeded to an ancestor by the Indians in the seventeenth century. So, too, the Waldo Patent was part of an ancient Penobscot Indian deed of land to colonial Governor William Phips, a claim that through family and time became part of the Knox claim to the land. It is in the governance of Phips that the merger of Salem, huge old houses, and enormous Maine holdings sought by the American claimant develop into Hawthorne's speculation about the nature of the American Dream that is the center of *The House of the Seven Gables*.

William Phips (1651-95) was the Royal Governor of Massachusetts in 1692. It was he who initiated the witchcraft courts, opening an ugly moment of hideous hysteria and land-grabbing greed whose memory Hawthorne was to feel

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as a shadow upon the soul of the nation generally and of his own family especially. The 1692 heat of Puritan zeal scorched everyone—even the Governor's wife was accused. When that happened, however, Phips found it convenient to listen more closely to rising opposition to the trials, and on October 29, 1692, he officially dismissed the court. But the oppressiveness of Judge Hathorne's court days lingered. In 1695 Thomas Maule, a builder who had been architect and construction chief of Salem's first Quaker church (1688), was jailed for publishing a pamphlet which accused the authorities of church and state in Salem of the real crimes committed during the witchcraft madness. He had been publicly whipped with ten lashes because he had leveled a charge of false preachment against Pastor John Higginson of the First Church of Salem. (Hawthorne resurrected Higginson to begin the festivities at Colonel Pyncheon's open-house party.) The witchcraft purge established the basic setting and characters for Hawthorne, even to the ancestral curse that is the legacy of the Pyncheon family: Thomas Hutchinson's *History of Massachusetts* (1795), a book that Hawthorne read, includes an episode in which Sarah Good, a woman convicted of witchcraft, pointed at one of her judges, the Reverend Nicholas Noyes, and said, "God will give him blood to drink."

There are times when life seems to follow art. Noyes died of a hemorrhage, for one thing. For another, after having used real names (even the physician, John Swinnerton, was real, and his stepson married Maule's daughter) for fictional events, and choosing a fictitious, Dickensian name—Pinch-on—for the grasping, guilty family, Hawthorne was brought up short by protests from a real family of Salem Pynchons of whom he had never heard. It was only fitting that they should actually exist, so closely interwoven were Hawthorne's actual materials in an imagination that assimilated