

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

Nathaniel Hawthorne

The House of the Seven Gables

Read by **Peter Marinker**



NA338112D

1	The House is built	8:30
2	Death pays a call	8:53
3	The descendants of Colonel Pyncheon	10:49
4	Miss Hepzibah sets up shop	26:45
5	Judge Pyncheon and Uncle Venner	13:39
6	Cousin Phoebe comes to stay	10:40
7	Cousin Phoebe comes to stay (cont.)	5:57
8	Mr. Holgrave introduces himself	14:23
9	The return of Clifford	8:35
10	A cold welcome for the Judge	10:15
11	Clifford's confusion	11:10
12	The Daguerrotypist as observer	6:09
13	The story of Alice Pyncheon	22:01
14	A moonlight conversation.	9:13
15	Phoebe takes her leave.	5:05
16	Cousin Jaffrey states his terms	17:23
17	A journey by train	8:28
18	'Rise up, Judge Pyncheon!'	6:18
19	Nobody home in Pyncheon Street	5:30
20	The hour of terror and bliss	13:29
21	The secret inheritance	13:51

Total time: 3:57:20

Nathaniel Hawthorne

The House of the Seven Gables

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 -1864) is considered one of America's greatest writers. The main pillars on which his literary reputation rests are *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and *The Marble Faun* – published in England under the title *Transformation* (1860).

In 1849 Hawthorne wrote an entry in his notebook: 'To inherit a great fortune. To inherit a great misfortune.' These brief phrases neatly encapsulate the theme of *The House of the Seven Gables* – that of a family whose fortunes are poisoned by its past misdeeds. The sins of the Pyncheon father are visited upon his children over a period of several generations, until such time as one of his descendants unites with a member of the family he has wronged. Love conquers hate, and new blood washes away the original crime.

This tale of sin and retribution is one which had a deep personal relevance for Hawthorne. His birthplace, Salem Massachusetts, was the scene of the notorious witch trials of 1692. Not only was

this an episode in America's history which the public had come to view as shameful, but several of his ancestors were deeply implicated, having acted as judges during the trials. The Hawthorne family's fortunes had declined during the intervening years, and it would have been tempting to see in this the hand of fate, bringing down on them a punishment for the misdeeds of their forebears.

Just as certain aspects of the story are informed by actual historical events, so several characters are based on real persons. In some cases Hawthorne even made use of existing surnames; for instance there was a Thomas Maule who had been publicly whipped for publishing a pamphlet exposing crimes committed by the church and the authorities during the witch hunts. There was also, during the trials, a woman convicted of witchcraft who had cursed her judge with the words: 'God will give him blood to drink', and either by coincidence or an act of divine intervention the judge, some time later, did indeed die of a haemorrhage. A horrific murder was

committed in Salem during Hawthorne's lifetime, where the evidence pointed to the guilt of the victim's nephew, although in real life, as opposed to the fictional case of poor Clifford, justice prevailed. In creating the character of Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne took revenge on a local politician whom he considered responsible for terminating his employment in the Boston Customs House, where he had taken a position to augment his income as an author.

Hawthorne's marriage is known to have been a remarkably happy one, and the delightful Phoebe of the novel is undoubtedly modelled on his adored wife Sophia. So, too, is there much of the author's own character in the artist Holgrave, with his habit of observing and anatomising people, his hatred of social pretension, and the struggle between the revolutionary and the conservative tendencies in his nature.

Hawthorne skilfully blended aspects of real events and persons into a tale which holds the listener rapt as it unfolds. The harmony of the novel's construction is reminiscent of a classical symphony; the theme is stated, developed, brought to a climax and to a final resolution. A *leitmotif*

runs through the story; the need to become free of the past.

At the time Hawthorne was writing, the newly independent America was only seventy-five years old, and the sense of freedom it had gained from casting off its English shackles was still in the air. In the themes of *The House of the Seven Gables* – sloughing off the burden of a blood-soaked past, the decline of an old worn-out aristocracy and the rise of democratic youth, reconciliation between former enemies, the instatement of love where formerly there had been hate – it is impossible not to sense a parallel which links the political and personal perspectives of the story.

Also in the forefront of public consciousness at the time Hawthorne was writing was the subject of Mesmerism, or hypnosis. Mesmer himself died in 1815, but his methods continued to excite interest and debate until, towards the end of the century, they formed the basis for the research into the human mind conducted by Freud and others.

Implicit in the story of *The House of Seven Gables* is the idea that certain people are born with the ability to exercise their will over others, that they are able to use

this power for good or evil according to their natures, and that it was for this that people in former times were executed as witches. The power is inherited by members of the Maule family: Maule, the 'Wizard', is put to death for possessing it although he has committed no crime; his grandson Matthew Maule the carpenter uses it to wreak revenge with disastrous results; Holgrave, another descendant, inherits the power but declines to use it over Phoebe.

It is Holgrave who brings light into the darkness of the Pyncheon house by means of his Daguerreotypes, an early form of photography. With these pictures made by the sun's rays, the brightness of the modern world enters the old house, revealing what has been hidden by the ancient gloom. The camera cannot lie, and in contrast to the old painting of his ancestor the Colonel, Judge Pyncheon's photographic portrait shows the sitter's true character beneath his veneer of false bonhomie.

During his college years Hawthorne had become close friends with two other gifted young men destined to make their way in the world. One was the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the other, Franklin Pierce, who became President of the United

States in 1853. After his election, Pierce offered Hawthorne the position of Consul in Liverpool. Hawthorne accepted gratefully, and he and his wife and children spent the next four years in England.

When his term of office ended, he and his family travelled extensively on the continent of Europe before returning to spend a further two years in England, during which time his last novel, *The Marble Faun* (published in England as *Transformation*), was completed.

Whilst travelling in Italy Hawthorne's youngest daughter contracted an obscure disease, from which she never completely recovered. The family returned to the United States in 1860, and settled once again in Concord, Massachusetts. Whether Hawthorne was suffering from the same disease as his daughter, or possibly as a result of his distress at her illness, his health began to fail rapidly during the next few years, and he died on May 19, 1864.

Notes by Neville Jason

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

MENDELSSOHN SONGS WITHOUT WORDS II Peter Nagy, Piano	8.550453
SCHUMANN WALDSZENEN, OP 82 Paul Gulda, Piano	8.550401
LISZT PIANO SONATA IN B MINOR Jeno Jando, Piano	8.550510
COUPERIN PIECES DE CLAVECIN BOOK 2 Alan Cuckstone, Harpsichord	8.550460
COUPERIN PIECES DE CLAVECIN BOOK 3 Alan Cuckstone, Harpsichord	8.550461

Music programmed by Neville Jason.

Cover picture: *View of Dungan Manor House, Statan Island,*
1876 by Wright, James Henry (1813–83)
Courtesy Bridgeman Art Library

Nathaniel Hawthorne

The House of the Seven Gables

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'To inherit a great fortune. To inherit a great misfortune.'

These words, from Nathaniel Hawthorne's notebook, neatly encapsulate the theme of *The House of the Seven Gables* – that of a family whose fortunes are poisoned by its past misdeeds. The sins of the Pyncheon father are visited upon his children over a period of several generations, until such time as one of his descendants unites with a member of the family he has wronged. Love conquers hate, and new blood washes away the original crime. This intriguing and insightful novel truly deserves its significant place in the canon of American literature.



Peter Marinker has worked extensively in theatre nationwide throughout the UK and in the USA, including leading roles in *Lancelot and Guinevere* and *The Merchant of Venice* at the Old Vic, and the title role in *Macbeth* for the Open Space Theatre. His TV work includes numerous roles for the BBC, and his film credits include *The Russia House* and *Emerald Forest*. He also features on Naxos AudioBooks' *Great Speeches in History* and Beckett's *A Piece of Monologue*.

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