

Vol. 4 No. 1 Maret 2012

ISSN 1978-2683

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Evil as Seen in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The House of Seven Gables

Penerbit

**Pusat Penelitian Budaya dan Pariwisata
Lembaga Penelitian Universitas Jember**

Evil as Seen in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables*

(Kejahatan dalam Gambaran *The House of Seven Gables* Karya Hawthorne)

L. Dyah Purwita Wardani SWW

Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Sastra Universitas Jember

Jalan Kalimantan 37 Jember 68121

dyahpwsww@gmail.com

Diterima 14 November 2011/Direvisi 16 Februari 2012

Abstraks

Tulisan ini membahas sisi buruk jiwa manusia yang digambarkan dalam novel karya Nathaniel Hawthorne yang berjudul *The House of Seven Gables*. Novel ini dibedah dengan pendekatan sosiologis dan menggunakan metode analisis deskriptif. Diargumentasikan bahwa novel ini menggambarkan pandangan Hawthorne mengenai hati yang murni. Digambarkan bahwa hati manusia penuh dosa dan bahwa mereka dibutakan oleh dosa dan kejahatan sehingga mereka tidak dapat melihat bahwa permasalahan berada dalam diri mereka. Akan tetapi, Hawthorne percaya bahwa kejahatan hati yang diwarisi hanya dapat diatasi dengan cinta sejati sebagaimana diwujudkan Phoebe Pyncheon yang menyatukan keluarga Pyncheon dan Maule dengan mencintai Holgrave Maule.

Kata kunci: kejahatan, cinta murni, puritanisme, novel, Hawthorne

1. Introduction

The House of Seven Gables was the second work of Nathaniel Hawthorne which presents the human depth soul. He explores the good and evil side of the human heart. Much of Hawthorne's writing centers around New England and many feature moral allegories with a Puritan inspiration. His fiction works are considered part of the Romantic movement and, more specifically, dark romanticism. His themes often center on the inherent evil and sin of humanity and his works often have moral messages and deep psychological complexity (<http://library.thinkquest.org/C0126184/english/litamericandark.htm>)

His Puritan background is a fertile soil to explore his novel. Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The House of the Seven Gables* reveals human heart through descriptive characterization of the many protagonists. These main characters are Hepzibah, Clifford, Colonel Pyncheon, Phoebe, Holgrave, and Matthew Maule. Once, the power of this novel is also in the moral value portrayed well by Hawthorne in this *The House of the Seven Gables* by using the symbol. Tremaine McDowell (1933:7) says that the American Romantics hit upon various symbol to represent the object of their unformulated longing and aspiration.

While the Romantics believed reality to be pale and empty, the Dark Romantics thought quite the opposite. Life to the Dark Romantics was colorful, unpredictable, and contradictory. Evil is a very old term for describing that which is morally bad, corrupt, immoral, selfish, and wicked. In *The House of Seven gables*, Nathaniel Hawthorne described that the characters had different reality between appearance and action. So the objective of the study is to reveal the evil of human heart from the action done by each character. In order to deepen the analysis, the scope of the paper will be mostly on the characters especially to Clifford, Hepzibah and Judge Pyncheon. We will also talk about the Puritan society atmosphere in which had a big role in shaping Nathaniel Hawthorne's mind.

The problems that will be discussed in this study are to describe the matter "How is evil revealed by Hawthorne in *The House of the Seven Gables*?" Concerning through the major characters, this question will be systematically answered by some sub questions as formulated as follows : 1) What are the visible decay of Puritan seen in Pyncheon's family?; b) What are the deadly sins?

Theoretically, sociological approach is used in which the analysis is related to the background of the society and the author. In *The House of Seven Gables*, we cannot separate the Puritan society where Hawthorne lived. Wellek and Warren (1956) stated that sociological approach related to sociology of the author that discussed about social status, social ideology, and others thing that related to the author as the producer of literature. Sociological approach, where everything we experience on a daily basis is up for reconsideration, where what we "take for granted" is revealed as a (sometimes intended, sometimes unintended) construction of society. Therefore, in using sociological approach, we will also discuss the author as part of society supporting the work.

Library research is employed in this paper using the novel "The House of Seven Gables" as a main book to discuss. Some related data and sources are taken from the original writings, critical studies, articles, encyclopedia, supported also from internet. In analyzing the novel, it is used *descriptive-analytic method*. After reading the story, I describe the problems, data, and information related to the topic. I accumulate the sources to support the analysis. Finally those sources are discussed by using the analytic method to find out the significant values in the story.

2. Discussion

2.1 Biographical sketch of the author

In the romantic era, the author and the works cannot be separated. Because the work is a reflection of the author's idea to communicate complex and subtle meaning. In *The House of Seven Gables*, the idea of a curse on the family of an evil judge is said to take the reader back to the Quaker and witch persecuting activities of Hawthorne ancestors.

He attended Bowdoin College and graduated in 1825; his classmates included future President Franklin Pierce and future poet Henry W. Longfellow. Hawthorne anonymously published several short stories in various periodicals which he collected in 1837 as *Twice-Told Tales*. The next year, he became engaged to Sophia Peabody. He worked at a custom house and joined a Transcendentalist Utopian Community, before marrying Peabody in 1842. They couple moved to Massachusetts, later moving to Salem, the Berkshires, then to the wayside in Concord. *The Scarlet Letter* was published in 1850, followed by a succession of other novel. A political appointment took Hawthorne and family to Europe before their return to the wayside in 1860. He died on May 19th 1864, leaving behind his wife and three children.

Much of Hawthorne's writing centers around New England many feature moral allegories with the puritan inspiration. His fiction works are considered part of the romantic-movement and more specially, dark romanticism. Dark romanticism is a transition period from Puritanism to early romanticism in which people look for sometimes new especially finding the truth of the real purifying. His themes often center on the inherent evil and sin of humanity and his works often have moral messages and deep psychological complexity. His published works included novels, short stories and biography of his friend, Franklin Pierce.

2.2 Social and Historical Background

As a New Englander and Romantic novelist, Hawthorne was a solitary man. He used symbolism and allegory in his writings. He wrote lucid narrative which rank high among the fictional works of the first half of the century.

As a romantic novelist, he believed that the truth could not only be discovered by reason, but also by intuition, imagination, and symbolism. For those who were romantic, imagination is the all important force.

a) Romanticism in America was the first greatest creative era, so many authors bore their writings at that time. Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of them. Even he was a solitary man, he lived in the era in which people appreciate individualism very much. That is why in this period they made the literature valuable as an expression of unique feeling, particular attitudes, and portraying experiences.

b) *Witchcraft and the Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692*

In 1692, a group of young women in Salem Village, which is now called Danvers, became hysterical after engaging in fortune telling rituals. The group, which included the minister's daughter, Ann Putnam, were eventually diagnosed as being under the spell of witchcraft and were pressed to tell who it was that had bewitched them. The girls began to accuse people, starting with three neighborhood women. The fervor took hold of the community and with a growing number of imprisonments resulting, the newly appointed Massachusetts governor (Sir William Philips) convened a special court to try the accused. In the months that followed, one hundred and fifty arrests were made, and many people were imprisoned. In the end, twenty individuals were hanged for the crime of practicing witchcraft. Hawthorne's great-grandfather, John Hathorne, was one of the three judges to preside over the trials. In 1711, the Massachusetts General Court financially compensated the families of some of the victims and their families for the wrongdoing (http://www.salem_witch_trials/wikipedia.html).

3. Evil as Seen Nathaniel Hawthorne's The House of Seven Gables

3.1 Pyncheon's Family as a Description of Puritan Decay

According to Puritan belief, discipline is very important. So they harden themselves to fulfill each of their destiny as the "chosen people". As Winthrop states although the Puritanism means many thing but for him to live in the world without taking his mind off God (Morgan,1958:8). So it would have been easier to withdraw from the world, as the monk and solitary person did, to denote oneself wholly to God. But the Puritan must live in the world. So their willing is spending their time to live harmoniously in their neighborhood, family and church

Nathaniel Hawthorne presents the puritans in the different side. He shows the decay of the Puritans by portraying the characteristic of Pyncheon's family. Reuben says that the characteristics of the Puritan decay are the decay of visible godliness, manifestation of pride, lack of social behavior, the increase of alcohol consumption. (Reuben,1998:9). Nathaniel Hawthorne describes the decay of godliness by characterizing Hepzibah and Clifford as characters who were not religious as Phoebe. On Sundays, after Phoebe had been at church- for the girl had a churchgoing conscience, and would hardly have been at ease had she missed either prayer, singing, sermon, or benefaction- (Hawthorne: 1965:129). Clifford and Hepzibah never go to church. "Hepzibah," asked Clifford, after watching Phoebe to the corner, " do you never go to church?" "No, Clifford!" (Hawthorne, 1965:141).

"On one of the Sabbath morning, Clifford sees the familiar gladness and holiness in Phoebe. In his mind, he sees a religion in herself and a spirit that was capable of heaven, so Clifford and Hepzibah want to go to the church. But they have no brave to step farther. It cannot be, Hepzibah! It is too late..... We are ghosts! We have no right among human being...." (Hawthorne, 1965:142).

When the Puritan retreats from the church, they will lose their soul. The misery will haunt them because the place to unite with Him is only in the church. Nathaniel Hawthorne

presents Clifford's misfortune when he was sent to the jail because he was accused murder his uncle-old Jaffrey Pyncheon. Returning home, Clifford withdraw from the human activity. He becomes insane. He is a childlike man. He cannot plunge to the world outside. He loses his soul.

Hepzibah also has a misfortune. She is a sixty years lady who must run a cent shop to earn her living. It happens when all their wealth taken by Judge Pyncheon and only leaving the ruin house for her. She must take care his brother who is very dependent to her. His brothers use up all her energy. All the dreadful incident shape her becoming an unhappy woman. She thinks that all her life is sadness. Her unhappy face is so popular in their neighborhood. As if she is the unhappiest person in the world. Phoebe describes Hepzibah "a sorrow as black as that was bright" (Hawthorne, 1965:85)

The manifestation of pride is usually present in high class families. Sometimes they feel ashamed to have performed the activities done by the lower or middle class families. It troubles them greatly. This condition is experienced by Hepzibah. It seems that she is very proud of herself for being born as a lady. The problem appears when her condition changes as a result of financial difficulties. in order to overcome her problem, Holgrave advises her to set up a cent-shop with faces Hepzibah with dilemma. As a lady, it is not appropriate for her to open a cent-shop. On the other hand, she has to face the reality that she needs money to survive.

"Oh, believe me Miss Hepzibah," said the young man, quietly, these feelings will not trouble you any longer, after you are once fairly in the mids of your enterprise. They are unavoidable at this moment, standing, as you do,....

"But I am a woman!" said Hepzibah , piteously. I was going to say a lady, but consider that as past"(Hawthorne, 1965:37).

The above quotation informs us that Holgrave tries to convince Hepzibah that it is better for her to end an epoch and start her life by working hard. Through Holgrave Nathaniel Hawthorne criticized the aristocratic tradition that places pride in high social degree, then he suggested that they come out of their proud shell of tradition and become a part of the populace.

Manifestation of pride is also evident in Clifford, he is very proud of beauty. He is not able to stand with anything that is not beautiful and enjoyable. It annoys him. "How changed! How changed! And is she angry with me? Why does she bent her brow so? (Hawthorne, 1965:89). Judge Pyncheon also expressed Clifford character when he wants to meet him, but Hepzibah rejects it. "...-with his delicate taste, and his love of the beautiful.-pictures, books, wine, luxuries of the table-he may command them all" (Hawthorne, 1965:107).

The pride is also shown by Colonel Phyncheon when he arranges party. He has an open house celebration to which he invites the aristocratic and plebeian. But each class receives different treatment. Two servants are pointing some of the guest of the neighbourhood of the kitchen, and ushering others into the elegant rooms, "...hospitality alike to all, but still with a scrutinizing regard to the high or low degree of each..." (Hawthorne:1965:25)

Thus early in the history of the house a pride in high social rank becomes apart of the Phyncheon tradition, which like all aristocratic tradition is based on the fragile foundation. Hepzibah and Clifford like to stay inside their home. They love living in the dark chamber instead of visiting or chatting to their neighbor. Evidently, this is to be the day of more than ordinary trial to Miss Hepzibah, who, for above a quarter of a century gone by, has dwelt in strict seclusion, taking no part in the business of life. and just as little in its intercourse and pleasures (Hawthorne,1965:25). It is a description of lacking social behavior. Hepzibah is

alone. She did not have a lover. She has never visited nor been visited by anyone else. Even her neighbor did not care about her.

Man's need to participate in the world's united struggle, as the isolated characters Clifford, Hepzibah and the Judge represent in three distinct ways in which a man is isolated from his fellows. In *The House of Seven Gables*, Nathaniel Hawthorne describes Mr. Pyncheon likes to drink sherry- it is wine which is used as aperitif. So person is allowed to drink as a recreation but not exhaust man physically or bore him or frustrate him. "The gentlemen then ordered a wine,... This sherry is too potent a wine for me; it has affected my brain already" (Hawthorne, 1965: 168).

So it is shown the decrease of Puritan discipline because of drinking too much. People who are drunk tend to lose their awareness. They can hurt other people easily without thinking twice. In a Puritan period, wine is used in a mass as a symbol of Christ's blood. So Puritan is accustomed to drink wine. But too much drinking wine can make people rude because he is losing his consciousness. So puritan may have recreation (drink wine) but he has control. Morgan says that no puritan objected to recreation. Recreation had to be fun and not exhaust a man physically or bore him or frustrate him (1958:10).

Morgan says that Puritanism was a movement that protested the corruption of faith and it struggled to purify many of the forms of faith and worship ritual in the Roman Catholic church as well as the Anglican church (1958:7). Nathaniel Hawthorne criticizes the Puritans who have lost their identity. In the beginning, they want to purify the church of England. They want to more "purity" of worship and doctrine, as well as personal and group piety based on the Bible. Puritans felt that the English Reformation had not gone far enough, and that the Church of England was tolerant of practices which they associated with the Catholic Church- Roman catholic. Their field of action lies among the external phenomena of life. As he expressed in Judge Pyncheon's characters.

Men of strong minds, great force of character, and a hard texture of the sensibilities are very capable of falling into mistakes of this kind. they are ordinarily men to whom forms are of paramount importance. They possess vast ability in grasping, and arranging, and appropriating to themselves the big, heavy, solid unrealities, such as gold, landed estate, offices of trust and emolument, and public honor. With this materials and with deeds of goodly aspect done in the public eye (Hawthorne: 1965:192).

3.2 Seven deadly Sins as seen on Pyncheon's Family

In this novel, Nathaniel Hawthorne also reveals the evil side of the human heart known as the seven deadly sins. Evil is a very old term for describing that which is morally bad, corrupt, immoral, selfish, and wicked. It is one half of the duality of good and evil expressed, in some form or another, by all known cultures. By its implication it describes a hierarchy of moral standards with regard to human behaviour. Evil being the least desired, while love is the most praised. In a casual or critical use, the word "evil" can characterize people and behaviours that are painful, ruinous, or disastrous. Many cultures and mythologies personify evil, such as with Satan in Christianity. Others describe evil spirits or demons as the agitators of acts (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puritanism>).

Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) described Seven Deadly Sins in his *Moralia in Job*. There are superbia (pride), invidia (envy), ira (anger), avaritia (avarice), tristitia (sadness), Gula (gluttony), luxuria (lust) (<http://www.le.ac.uk/arhistory/seedcorn/faq-sds.html>) . The church made a division between sins which were *venial* and could be forgiven without the need for the sacrament of Confession and those which were *capital* and merited damnation. Capital or Deadly Sins were so called because they could have a fatal effect on an individual's spiritual health and leading to the hell if they go away from God.

Hepzibah has a pride, anger and also sadness. She is proud to be an aristocratic woman so she is reluctant to run a cent shop as a plebeian. She is angry to the Judge Pyncheon who slanders Clifford and sends him to the jail. She also has sadness, she is easy to cry. All the evil side leads her to become an unhappy and solitude woman. Her neighbourhood considered her as a rude woman who has no heart. The people's misinterpretation makes her reluctant also to go to church.

We see envy, avarice, lust and greed in Judge Pyncheon's evil side. Judge is an honorable person in this town. When he sees Phoebe, he wants to kiss her but Phoebe rejects. He got his wealth from the old Pyncheon inheritance. Really he must share this with Clifford and Hepzibah but he grabs all for himself. He also wants to force Clifford to tell him about the hidden wealth. It is a letter from an Indian who conveys a vast extent of territory to the eastward. He does not seem satisfied with his prosperity and wants more wealth which comes from his ancestors. Clifford is a man who has lust and gluttony. He is fond of eating a delicious meal and he can stop eating before he is too full. After eating he will sleep directly in the dining room. He is a person who loves beauty. So he leans more to Phoebe than Hepzibah.

The House of Seven Gables is also worth pointing out that the number seven, as in seven gables, is hardly to be considered a random choice on Hawthorne's part. As religious scholar Dickson White explained almost a century ago, the number seven implies in agreement with this thesis statement for "The House of the Seven Gables" by the American author Hawthorne, a "vast mass of mysterious virtues" (p. 6) which are clearly important to theology. The number seven is considered to be a perfect number, representing as it does, the vast work of God's creation having been completed in seven days.

As a result, the number seven gave "rise to a sacred division of time and some else," including "the seven cardinal virtues and the seven deadly sins; in the seven liberal arts and the seven devilish arts, and, above all, in the seven sacraments. And as this proved in astrology that there could be only seven planets, so it proved in alchemy that there must be exactly seven metals." In short, seven is a number that has long represented ideal possibilities and potential. At the same time, it is vulnerable to corruption, as is the case in *The House of the Seven Gables* (<http://www.le.ac.uk/arhistory/seedcorn/faq-sds.html>).

Since biblical times, the device of the allegory has been an effective way to convey moral messages. The novel instructed readers about how to live by showing them how not to make irrevocable moral blunders that would bring shame upon themselves, destruction, and wrath upon their communities or society at large. But all the evil side can be removed by love. They express their love by doing the seven corporal works of mercy for everyone. They are: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to care for the sick, to visit the imprisoned and to bury the dead.

4. Conclusion

The Puritan decay was caused by the people themselves. They break God's law by doing the deadly sin. Nathaniel Hawthorne presents the evil side of human soul through the Pyncheon's family blunders. This novel also shows Hawthorne's opinion of the Puritan heart. He believed that their hearts were full of sin, and that they were blinded by the sin and evil so much that they could not even see that the problem lies within themselves. But Hawthorne believed that the inherited evil of the heart could only be overcome by true love. As Phoebe Pyncheon did. She unites the Pyncheon and the Maule family by loving Holgrave Maule.

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