

# Holgrave's challenges essay

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Challenges and changes are a part of life. Many people, especially elderly who have set views can very easily resent changes and anything that can be seen as a challenge to their ideas and the times they remember. Magic has always been part of life but sometimes the magic life takes on a malicious spirit when manipulated by those who seek to bring about ruin. Society is built on traditions and revolutions to challenge others.

These seemingly unconnected ideas come together in the character of Holgrave and the plot of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The House of the Seven Gables*. Holgrave works as a force of change and challenges conceptions through his profession as a daguerreotypist. But at the same time his ideas and actions are based on his identity as a Maule, a family, which meet its downfall by the work of a Pyncheon in Puritan days of settlement. Holgrave affects changes in the novel and works to help others see the truth of the situation.

Holgrave himself and his views on the past are changed by his actions in marrying a Pyncheon. Hepzibah is scarred by the challenges to her own conventionally and sees what Holgrave stands for as a threat to her ideas but he does not frighten her. She had originally seen him as a "well-meaning and ordinary young man" (Hawthorne 63).

This original assessment, based on his appearance, is what caused Hepzibah to grant him permission to take out a room. But as time went on "she hardly knew what to make of him" (63). She observed that his friends all desired new ideas, particularly those of dress. Pheobe becomes very frightened and

inquires as to why Hepzibah allows such a "lawless person" (63) to stay and Hepzibah's response is "..

.. he has a law of his own" (63). Even with all these concerns Hepzibah has about Holgrave she "has to admit from her own contact with him that even by her formal standards she is a quiet and orderly young man" (Matthiessen 371). So even though she voices all her suspicions about Holgrave's morality to Pheobe, Hepzibah, in the end, still believes in the truth of her original feelings about Holgrave. Not only her acceptance of Holgrave but her dependence on him as shown in the chapter entitled "The First Customer". She decided to open the cent shop in the Pyncheon house once more. This seems like a great feat for someone so far removed from society.

The cent shop has been stocked and cleaned for business. It is soon learned that Holgrave has helped with the re-opening of the cent shop. He inquires as to if he "can assist you any further" (Hawthorne 31).

Here it is shown that despite all her reservations, Hepzibah is willing to accept help from this man who she distrusts, "Hepzibah's limited intercourse with the world and her comparative ineptitude at handling the merchandise of the shop" (Marks 340). When Hepzibah is in her shop on its first day, Holgrave comes to purchase some biscuits but she won't accept payment from him claiming "a Pyncheon must not, at all events under her father's roof, receive money for a morsel of bread from her only friend!" (Hawthorne structures the story so as to allow the cent shop scene to appear before Hepzibah's statements about her distrust towards Holgrave to show how appearances are deceiving and how a natural aversion to something can color your

judgement. It is obvious that Hepzibah deeply relied on Holgrave and his help in the cent shop. But she also recognizes Holgrave's uniqueness and a boarder or "the worth of? Holgrave's self-reliance." (Marks 342). Since Hepzibah is willing to risk all by opening a cent shop it is obvious that she is in need of money. But since she already had one boarder she doesn't consider taking on any more.

By choosing the cent shop over boarders she shows that even though she has been in seclusion she recognizes that not everyone is a self-reliant as Holgrave and this only causes her to rely on him more. Daguerreotyping shows the inner person rather than the outwardly appearance in a way that painting cannot. Holgrave meets Pheobe in the garden and starts a conversation with her about the use of daguerreotyping as a way to see truth in everyday life, "While we give it credit for only depicting the merest surface, it can actually bring out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon." (Hawthorne 68). Holgrave has extreme views on the danger of overdue emphasis on the past in the present life. He challenges the ideas of aristocracy. This challenge to "the root of ideas of a conservative, capitalist society-tradition, succession, and property" (Buitehuis 99) is something that has been resent in the Maule blood.

Matthew Maule, when summoned to the Pyncheon house goes in the front door, instead of the back, as would have been acceptable to someone of his social standing. Holgrave holds drastic views on the danger of the past: If each generation were allowed and expected to build its own houses, that single change, comparatively unimportant in itself, would imply almost every reform which society is now suffering for. I doubt whether even our public

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edifices - our capitols, state houses, courthouses, city hall, and churches - ought to be built of such permanent material as stone or bricks. It were better that they should crumple to ruin once in every twenty years or thereabouts, as a hint to the people to examine into and reform the institutions which they symbolize. (Hawthorne 140) Such an extreme view can often be frightful to many people. But the reason which this view is so extreme is shown when Holgrave explains how he believes that all of the vices which have tormented the Pyncheon family exist in the house of the seven gables. This is because it was built by the old colonel, " For Holgrave, the House of the Seven Gables is expressive of the " odious and abominable Past" against which he declaims publicly.

" (Martin 136). Holgrave claims the proof for this belief is that all the vices and traits, which have been exhibited by the Pyncheons, were originally seen in the Colonel. Hawthorne has previously foreshadowed the tempering of Holgrave's view, " and when, with the years settling down more weightily upon him, his early faith should be modified by inevitable experience, it would be with no harsh and sudden revolution of his sentiments. (137). By the end of the novel, Holgrave has come to the determination that the past is important because it serves to remind people of what they are but that the past should be mingled with the present. This is brought about by his further involvement in the lives of the Pyncheons. Holgrave marries Pheobe, " although Pheobe's marriage with Holgrave, who discloses himself at length as a descendant of the Maules, it is meant finally to transcend the old brutal separation of classes that has hardened the poor family against oppressors..

. ” (Matthiessen 374), the marriage only succeeds in changing Holgrave's ideas. Holgrave reverts to a moderate idea that the facades of houses should be built to withstand for generations but that the interiors of these ancestral mansions should be subject to change and rededication every generation. This would allow people to appreciate and remember their ancestors but at the same time allow for more reform and new ideas to challenge traditional conceptions. Holgrave had never been in the possession of money or wealth so his abhorrence at the permanence of a society dominated by family connections and wealth is understood. But once he gains wealth and prominence, through marriage to a Pyncheon, he now desires the society and its views since he now belongs to that society. Another theme in the novel into which Holgrave figures prominently is the use of magic.

As we learn from Holgrave's tale of Alice Pyncheon and his ancestor Matthew Maule, the Maule family has had the gift of controlling the actions of others, “ Holgrave is the last surviving representative of a family whose line has been supposed extinct; a family whose characteristics, while it was known, consisted mainly in much personal reserve and a reputation for occult power over others” (Von Abele 397). After Holgrave even admits to having this power, “... he had been a public lecturer on Mesmerism, for which science .. he had very remarkable endowments. ” (Hawthorne 135). Now he realizes, “ that he can exert a similar power over Pheobe but he has too much integrity ..

. to press his advantage. ” (Gollin 137). The reason that this show of mesmerism by Holgrave comes immediately following the story of Matthew

Maule and Alice Pyncheon is to show the evolution of the Maules. Holgrave forebears had no scruples about using witchcraft to control another human being. However, Holgrave has too much respect for Pheobe to subject her to that sort of loss of self. Hawthorne states how great a temptation it was for Holgrave to know that he could have someone under his complete control.

But then recognizes Holgrave's high moral fiber in resisting the temptation. This juxtaposition of the two Maules shows how the passage of time has worked to improve the Maule family while the Pyncheon remains just as susceptible to these works of wizardry. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the character of Holgrave works as a daguerreotypist. Holgrave also happens to be a boarder in one of the seven gables. Holgrave's work as a daguerreotypist acts as a parallel for his own life. His life challenges the conventional ideas possessed by Hepzibah since she is frightened by him.

In the same way, his daguerreotypes show the inner person, not the person whom the world sees. The idea of magic to achieve importance is used throughout the novel. Holgrave's family, the Maules, started out as practitioners of witchcraft but Holgrave rejects using witchcraft.