

Study on the Characterization of the Young Maule: A Self-split in the House

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Abstract: The novel *The House of the Seven Gables* is structured around an old feud between two families originated from their disputes over the right ownership of a piece of land. A strong sense of isolation is displayed in the presentation of protagonists, which have eventually led to their personal tragedy: separation, loss of self, or even death. And the young Maule is literarily created to be a psychological self-split, representing those with mind and body separated in reality.

1. Introduction

As is clearly shown in the novel *the House of the Seven Gables*, almost all the main characters are depicted to suffer a sense of isolation in different degrees when the society they are living in undergoes a rapid and tremendous transformation from the old colonial society to a fresh new democratic society. When the old established order and value systems are shaken and collapsed, people in the world of flux experience great pain for the loss of their former existence, feeling unable to develop a normal and harmonious relationship with others and the external world. Driven by maladjustment or by frenzy zeal in the pursuits of personal advantages, man either turns into an utter persecutor of others or into a marginal figure in a rapid changing society. Under certain social circumstances, man can even be subjected to a more tragic state of social existence in which he is divided between inner self and outer self. The Second Maule in the story is just one of the representatives created literarily by Hawthorne for those self-divided in reality. Among the Maule's family, the young Maule can be considered a most complicated and tragic figure since he is depicted as a man who has lost his humanity in his bitter hatred and revenge on his family enemy. On one hand, he has a natural affection for pure and beautiful Alice Pyncheon in his subconscious mind. For another, the young Maule is heavily burdened with two families' feud and hyper sense of class differences he and Alice belong to. In the end, he does not win Alice's love honestly as many love stories go. Instead, he mercilessly toys with Alice, humiliates her in public, and even destroys his inner adored girl to death.

2. A self-split: A natural admirer and morbid persecutor of Alice Pyncheon

Though she is not depicted heavily in the story, Alice Pyncheon, the granddaughter of the old Colonel, is portrayed to be such a pure lady in the town that her exceedingly beautiful appearance, lovely characters and accomplished talents make her admired and loved by those around her. The great bunches of red roses grown between the two front gables enjoy a name given by the townspeople as Alice's Posies. In their eyes, these beautiful flowers brighten those whoever sees them just as the fragrance of Alice's delightful character scents the place where she lives. Her high characters of beauty, gentleness and stateliness are even exaggerated by the narrator to be so particular and attractive that "a man of generous nature would have been content to lie down in her path, and let Alice set her slender foot upon his heart"^{[1]242}. It's justified in saying that the young Maule has the same admiration for Alice as his townsmen do in the deep heart which can be detected from the following details revealed in the story. When the young Maule is asked to go to the Pyncheon house, he is hesitant about the summon of his immediate presence because of the ancient family feud in his mind, but he finally agrees to go and reminds the messenger of not forgetting to convey his respect to the "fair" and "gentle" mistress Alice^{[1]226}. While the young Maule approaches the Pyncheon's house, his eyes lie on a beautiful figure of the young Alice whose

presence “imparted an indiscernible grace and faint witchery to the whole edifice” ^{[1]230}. To the young Maule, the young lady is just like a beautiful and delicate rose and endows the whole scene with mysterious charm. After the young Maule steps into the house, he hears a piece of sweet music vibrating along the corridor; he immediately fancies it must be played by the young pure Alice who spends her leisure time between flowers and music. It’s generally agreed that music and red flowers are always associated with typical feminine qualities a male admires. So Alice and Maule seem to be preinstalled in a potential love scene. As the story goes, such a possible physical attractiveness does emerge between the young Maule and Alice Pyncheon. Alice is, in Maule’s eye, an “exotic, beautiful, delicate” lady who was “born, and set apart from the world’s vulgar mass by a certain, gentle and cold stateliness”, while Maule is, from the perspective of Alice, a man with “the remarkable comeliness, strength and energy” ^{[1]242}. Such attraction might be interpreted as natural appreciation of each other, and both detect the excellent and charming qualities in their opposite sex. However, this encounter fails to bring about a sweet romantic story between these young people. Instead, their meeting is devastating for both of them since the pure Alice is made a tool of revenge and tortured ungracefully till her death, while the inner admiration for Alice in the young Maule is torn into pieces by his outer self heavily laden with family feud and class antagonism.

Alice is innocent and blameless in the encounter with the young Maule in that before their actual meeting with each other, the hostility towards the Pyncheon family has already been provoked in the mind of the young Maule. Every detail about the luxurious exteriors and interiors of the House serve as strong and mighty visual stimuli to the young carpenter with a deep-rooted family grudge and bitter class disparity borne in the mind. The energetically and cheerful activities of servants, the French coffee, the costly carpet, the Venetian antiques and the Claude painting on the wall work together to stir his psychological imbalance caused by his persistent belief that the impressive and splendid mansion stands on the very soil which should have been his own family. What’s more, humiliation usually creates a motive to restore the lost honor or maintain a positive identity and to restore status and power ^{[2]29}. Hence, there are some stimuli for a violent action taken by the young Maule against Pyncheon’s family when Maule feels extremely hurt by an evident sense of arrogance and superiority from Alice’s father which will be illustrated in details in the later part. The air of nonchalance and haughty composure of Gervayse(Alice’s father) are nothing but a fuel upon the vindictive mood and the intensified antagonism which make it likely for a man of sternness and strong will to launch an open counter-attack upon Pyncheon family. In addition, the innocence of young Alice can also be hinted by the remarks of storyteller on Alice’s look at the young Maule.

A glow of artistic approval brightened over Alice Pyncheon’s face...but that admiring glance (which most other men, perhaps, would have cherished as a sweet recollection all through life) the carpenter never forgave. It must have been the devil himself that made Maule so subtle in his perception. ^{[1]242}

The different perceptions of Alice’s glance between “most men” and Maule serve as an indicator suggesting the possible misunderstanding of young Maule. The word “devil” cited above means much like the exceedingly sensitiveness in the mind of the young Maule which is capable to deprive a man of reason and judgment. The teller seems to imply the sympathy for the innocent Alice and to express his strong disapproval of the inordinate sensitiveness and unduly male’s self-esteem young Maule holds at that moment. Besides, Kenneth Dodge shows that hostile individuals are more likely to interpret ambiguous circumstances as being provocative and more apt to respond aggressively to perceived provocations. ^{[2]30}. And it is reasonable to believe that Maule’s view on “that admiring glance” from Alice as a contemptuous look is a wrong and mistaken interpretation. And such a misinterpretation, in consequence, makes Maule feel extremely intolerable and unforgivable for a man in his position and disposition. The young Maule thought with teeth gnashed, “Does the girl look at me as if I were a brutal beast? She shall know whether I have a human spirit; and the worse for her, if it prove stronger than her own!” ^{[1]242}. The utterance quoted here clearly exhibits the internalized rage borne by the young Maule who feels being looked down upon by the one he admires secretly in his mind. Thus, what Maule appears to do next is to prove that he is indeed a man with superiority in both sex and social status. Such understanding of Maule’s twisted inner

feelings is further confirmed in his announcement when he successfully exerts the dominating power over the mesmerized Alice, “She is mine! Mine, by the right of the strongest spirit” ^{[1]248}. Thus, the inner admiration for Alice is immediately distorted into a completely dishonest possession and control of the latter. And the outwardly seeming revenge taken by the young Maule on the Pyncheon family obviously turns into the oppression of a weak and innocent individual by another with magic and mighty power. Such an impression becomes even more conspicuous in the subsequent description of the torments suffered by Alice Pyncheon. Under the mesmerizing power from Maule, Alice, whether in public or at home, would suddenly lose self-control, and break into wild laughter, gushes of tears or “dance some high-paced jig more befitting the brisk lasses at a rustic merry-making” ^{[1]252}. Being a mental slave to the young Maule, Alice lives in a humiliating life with all the dignity and freedom gone. What Maule seems to seek later is a perverse pleasure and satisfaction in the humiliation of the virginal lady. Such an oppression conducted by the young Maule ends in a tragedy. The maiden Alice died of too much shame and humiliation. At the death of Alice, Maule feels extremely regret, walking behind the mourning procession “with teeth gnashed as if he would have bitten his own heart in twain” for his malevolent intention is to “humble Alice, not to kill her” ^{[1]253}.

3. Causes of self-division in the young Maule

Confronted with rosy-like Alice Pyncheon, the young Maule, as most men, naturally develops an instinctual admiration of this beautiful girl in his subconscious mind. In this sense, the young Maule has the normal capability to distinguish beauty and ugliness in the life. In addition, he also shows a subconscious desire to win recognition and love from his adored girl. That means the young Maule has the similar yearning for a happy life as most people do. However, the ending of their meetings is not Maule’s truly winning of love and beauty, but Maule’s destruction of his admired maiden. Why the young Maule finally betrays his true nature and humanity in his merciless toy with such a fair lady? The reason for this betrayal against his inner self can be analyzed from the perspective of social identities. On the one hand, the young Maule has an acute sense of class disparity, which seems to form an insurmountable barrier between him and Alice. Alice obviously grows up in a family with a much higher class status than the young Maule does. The house of Alice’s family is depicted impressively magnificent with “the sharp rising peaks, the glittering plaster-work, portals of carved oak, and the thoroughly water-tight roof”. Besides, the comfortable and prosperous life of an upper family is clearly mirrored from “the fat cook, the neatly dressed maid-servants, the slaves with shining face” ^{[1]229}. In contrast, the young Maule lives in a hired “humble and mean” room, obscure and poverty-stricken. What’s more, when the young Maule steps into the room, what comes into sight are the costly imported furniture; the delicately wrought carpet; a marble woman in the corner and an impressive oil- painting hang on the wall. All inside the House draws a clear picture of the luxurious life a plebeian hardly imagines in his mind. Third, it’s evident that Gervayse(Alice’s father) has an arrogant sense of superiority to the young Maule. It’s Gervayse who sends his servant to require the “immediate presence” of the young carpenter, but he continues sipping coffee, without the intention of immediate meeting with the young carpenter who arrives at the House. His arrogance is shown again in his neglecting the name of the young carpenter. And he nonchalantly says “Your name, I, think, is Maule,-Thomas or Matthew Maule.” ^{[1]233}. His class superiority and pride deliver a clear message that a man in Maule’s humble station does not deserve appropriate attention from the one as in Pyncheon’s aristocratic position, much less a possibility for his approval of his daughter’s connection with the young Maule. On the other hand, Alice lives in a family with an old feud with Maule’s family, which forms another huge emotional gap for him to ignore and transcend over. At the very beginning of little scene, when the young Maule answers the summon delivered by the servant of Gervayse Pyncheon(Alice’s father), he murmurs to himself with “black” face, “My old grandfather, the wizard, will be pretty sure to stick to the Pyncheon as long as their walls hold together”. When a hot argument starts between Alice’s father and young Maule over the legal ownership of the house stead, the young Maule directly rebukes that he does hold a “natural resentment” towards the Pyncheons since the Maules are the “rightful proprietor of

the soil” ^{[1]234}. Such a strikingly strong hostility can also be gained from the diction employed by the storyteller in the brief recollection of old family feud, in the encounter between Alice’s father and the young Maule, and in the horrible re-presentation of three deceased ancestors of two families. The word “enemy” is used three times in the reminiscences of persecution of old Maule by Colonel Pyncheon, and is interpreted by the narrator as “very arch enemy whom they were intended to distress and utterly overwhelm” ^{[1]227}. While the word “contest” is applied twice in the hostile dialogue between Alice’s father and young Maule, the choices of the words “enemy” “contest” and “utterly overwhelm” further draw a bloody scene of two families in the opposing social positions that have a mutual intention of possession or destruction of their opponents. Such impression is further reinforced in the horrible depiction of three deceased men who finally get into a fight in which the two Maules “struggled” with Colonel Pyncheon, and “pressed their hands over his mouth; and forthwith there was a flesh flow of blood upon his band” ^{[1]249}. The words of “struggled”, “pressed” and “a flesh flow of blood” seem to give a message that the hostility is so deeply rooted in the minds of family members that only through the utter destruction of their opponent can the resentment be dissolved. Therefore, this deep-rooted family hatred binds the young Maule as a tight psychological bondage, and makes him unable to ignore and go beyond the vast emotional gap between him and his adored girl.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, incapable of transcending over the family and class gulfs, the young Maul betrays himself in toying mercilessly with an innocent girl he admires till her death. The ancient family feud and the sharp class disparity are like a suffocating cage, imprisoning the young Maule’s inner pursuit of love and happiness. When his inner self is confined and repressed by this outer cage to extremes, the young Maule is distorted psychologically to vent his own hatred on an innocent fair lady. Hawthorne once put, “All slavery is reciprocal”^{[3]107}. Here, Hawthorne relates slavery to a sort of psychological imprisonment. To him, any spiritual slavery of one to another might be the most horrible thing in the world since two opposing forces are not only planted deeply in individuals but throw both enslaver and the enslaved in a tragic state of reciprocal enslavement. In other words, the victimizer is, to some extent, the victim of himself.

References

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