



REVIEW ARTICLE

ALIENATION AND AESTHETICAL SALVATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN *THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES*

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ABSTRACT

The House of the Seven Gables is one of the most representative works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American writer and novelist. In this novel, Hawthorne, in the basis of the house of the seven gables, through the old Gothic tradition of an inherited curse, depicts a story in which the Pyncheon family was gotten back at because the thuggery committed by the ancestors of Pyncheon Family. In the meaning time, this novel is one that bears huge symbolic significance. This paper, from the perspective of the critique of everyday life theory of Lefebvre, mainly talks about the alienation of people's everyday life and the aesthetical salvation of it. Academically, this novel is often interpreted from the perspective of Gothic Curse, symbolism, archetypal critical theory and so forth. This paper aims to further study the alienation and aesthetic salvation in this novel, thus promoting the research of Hawthorne in the domestic academical world.

KEYWORDS

Hawthorne, Lefebvre, Alienation, Aesthetical Salvation.

1. CRITIQUE OF EVERYDAY LIFE THEORY

Henri Lefebvre was a famous Marxist theorist and a famous critic of daily life in the western world. Critique of Everyday life theory was firstly put forward by Lefebvre in the basis of Marx's alienation theory. It was originally put forward because, in the 50s or 60s of the twentieth century, the domination of Capitalist ideology had extended its domain from political world to daily life. Therefore, people in that era were alienated by such ideology even in their daily life.

Before the birth of the critique of Everyday theory, the significance of everyday life is totally neglected for its triviality and philosophical insignificance (Huo, 2018). It was Henri Lefebvre who firstly stated that, despite its insignificance, everyday life had its own meanings. To Lefebvre, literature, as a kind of superstructure, contains more or less the traits of ideology (Meng, 2015). The main methodology of the critique of everyday life theory is to reveal the alienation of everyday life that is so common and engrained that are hardly noticed by people through the analysis and critique of everyday life itself, and then, after finding the alienation of everyday life, seek help from finding the art and beauty of everyday in an effort to eliminate alienation.

2. ALIENATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE BY CAPITALIST IDEOLOGY

In the House of the seven Gables, the alienation of capitalist ideology is ubiquitous. Such alienation can be seen from various examples. We should know, however, that such alienation is not directly shown or officially

stated, but implicitly denoted through everyday life. From the second chapter on, through the everyday life of Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon, we get to see the fall of the old aristocracy and the rise of new capitalism. It is mainly demonstrated in the fact that, after a hundred years, Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon reopened the cent-shop that was once fitted up by an unworthy ancestor of the Pyncheon family. When she is preparing for the opening of the store, we get to see a sharp contrast between the two ideologies. In the aspect of this dark-arrayed, pale-faced, ladylike old figure there was a deeply tragic character that contrasted irreconcilably with the ludicrous pettiness of her employment (Hawthorne, 1989).

Other than that, the mere fact that Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon had to open a store to earn a living denotes the transition from aristocracy to capitalism and the fact that such old aristocratic lady was in an awkward state for living in an alienated society. It can be clearly shown from the following sentences:

A lady who had fed herself from childhood with the shadowy food of aristocratic reminiscences, and whose religion it was that a lady's hand soils itself irremediably by doing aught for bread, this born lady, after sixty years of narrowing means, is fain to step down from her pedestal of imaginary rank. Poverty, treading closely at her heels for a lifetime, has come up with her at last. She must earn her own food, or starve (Hawthorne, 1989).

Even after Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon does open the store, she still doesn't want to accept her new identity and, after finding out that her very first

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customer is Holgrave, the sole occupant of the house, doesn't want to take his money. She says to Holgrave: "But I was born a lady, and have always lived one; no matter in what narrowness of means, always a lady (Hawthorne, 1989)." She doesn't want to relinquish her status as a lady, therefore she won't take her friend's money. She says to Holgrave: "A Pyncheon must not, at all events under her forefathers' roof, receive money for a morsel of bread from her only friend (Hawthorne, 1989)"

The scenario remains until the second visit of the little boy for another Jim Crow. After Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon takes the cent, everything becomes utmost different (Bechtold, 2017). She has no longer a lady, "but simply Hepzibah Pyncheon, a forlorn old maid, and keeper of a cent-shop! (Hawthorne, 1989)" Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon becomes another individual in the capitalist society, just as the following passages say:

It was done! The sordid stain of that copper coin could never be washed away from her palm. The little schoolboy, aided by the impish figure of the negro dancer, had wrought an irreparable ruin. The structure of ancient aristocracy had been demolished by him, even as if his childish gripe had torn down the seven-gabled mansioz (Hawthorne, 1989).

Here, in fact, it is not the schoolboy who really tears down the seven-gabled mansion, but Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon, the new store-keeper of the house (Bliss, 2014). In a capitalist society, which is quite different from that of the feudal society, people need to earn their own living by their own hands, otherwise they will surely starve, because in the capitalist society, individualism are strengthened more than ever. Through Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon's everyday life, we can see that such an old aristocratic lady is alienated by the rising capitalist ideology (Calanchi, 2012). Except for Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon, other characters also display the alienation of capitalist ideology in their everyday life, among which the best two examples are Judge Pyncheon and Ned Higgins, the little schoolboy (Cook, 2015).

While Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon stands for the fallen aristocratic lady, Judge Pyncheon, without a doubt symbolizes the representative of the newly risen capitalist ideology. It is evident from the novel that Judge Pyncheon knows perfectly well how the capitalist society works. He, as a capitalist, knows the best time to invent money, to speculate, to gather wealth, with an effort to make more money. He is a greedy person. What he does all day is to gather money, to appear as a honorable man with high social status, to hypocritically pursue concrete interests. The only reason he, hypocritically cares for Clifford is that he assumes he knows about the rest of the treasure (Grant, 2017).

In that sense, Judge Pyncheon is also alienated by the capitalist ideology. By no means can we see from him even a tinge of aristocratic traits. Such argument can be supported by various examples from the novel itself. First of all, let's take a look at his appearance. "A gold-headed cane, of rare Oriental wood, added materially to the high respectability of his aspect, as did also a neckcloth of the utmost snowy purity, and the conscientious polish of his boots (Hawthorne, 1989)."

From the statement we get to see that Judge Pyncheon's delicate appearance derives from his material delicacy. The word "materially" is also a pun indicating both the enormity of degree and how it adds to the high respectability by material possessions (Masterson, 2018). Judge Pyncheon's alienation is so profound and ubiquitous. However, such alienation is often neglected by the readers who always label Judge Pyncheon as the villain similar to colonel Pyncheon. That's not an entirely correct criticism.

Judge Pyncheon's alienation by the capitalist society is best shown through his "Everyday life". After Judge Pyncheon's mysterious death, the author, in a satirizing tone, shows us what the Judge's everyday life is like. It is also through his "everyday life" that we can see the usually tend-to-be-neglected alienation.

He cherishes his schemes, moreover, like other people, and reasonably brighter than most others; or did so, at least, as he lay abed this morning, in an agreeable half-drowse, planning the business of the day, and speculating on the probabilities of the next fifteen years (Hawthorne, 1989).

Five-and-twenty years for the enjoyment of his real estate in town and country, his railroad, bank, and insurance shares, his United States stock, his wealth, in short, however invested, now in possession, or soon to be acquired; together with the public honors that have fallen upon him, and the weightier ones that are yet to fall! It is good! It is excellent! It is enough! (Hawthorne, 1989).

Judge Pyncheon is alienated so that what he does every day is to plan for future growth of wealth, of money. And he has become a man finding pleasure only in wealth, and nothing else. Going further, let's see what Judge Pyncheon often does every day.

And has he forgotten all the other items of his memoranda? Clifford's affair arranged, he was to meet a State Street broker, who has undertaken to procure a heavy percentage, and the best of paper, for a few loose thousands which the Judge happens to have by him, uninvested (Hawthorne, 1989).

Half an hour later, in the street next to this, there was to be an auction of real estate, including a portion of the old Pyncheon property, originally belonging to Maule's garden ground. It has been alienated from the Pyncheons these four-score years; but the Judge had kept it in his eye, and had set his heart on reannexing it to the small demesne still left around the Seven Gables (Hawthorne, 1989).

We get to see from the narrative Judge Pyncheon's everyday activities. They are all centered on properties, investment, real estate and other business-related things. From all of the above mechanical, monotonous, tedious and repetitive lives of Judge Pyncheon, we see clearly the type of alienated life in the capitalist society. Lastly, let's take a look at another also very crucial character, Ned Higgins, who always seems to be neglected by the readers and the critics. Why does the author create such a character? What role does Ned Higgins play thematically?

The answer lies in the fact that, through Ned's everyday life, an alienated everyday life is also suggested. Let's take a look at what he does when he buys the Jim Crow. "No sooner had he reached the sidewalk (little cannibal that he was!) than Jim Crow's head was in his mouth (Hawthorne, 1989)." Then, without even finishing the first one, he comes right back, wanting more. "The crumbs and discoloration of the cannibal feast, as yet hardly consummated, were exceedingly visible about his mouth^[3]." In such way, he says that: I want that other Jim Crow. Then, after that, he becomes a regular customer with a power of eating lots of food. "One of the stanchest patrons was little Ned Higgins, the devourer of Jim Crow and the elephant, who to-day signalized his omnivorous prowess by swallowing two dromedaries and a locomotive." At last, his good appetite becomes well-known.

Recognizing little Ned Higgins among them, Hepzibah put her hand into her pocket, and presented the urchin, her earliest and staunchest customer, with silver enough to people the Domdaniel cavern of his interior with as various a procession of quadrupeds as passed into the ark (Hawthorne, 1989).

It certainly is no coincidence that Judge Pyncheon is also depicted as having a good appetite similar to that of Ned's. It says: "It was he, you know, of whom it used to be said, in reference to his ogre-like appetite, that his Creator made him a great animal, but that the dinner-hour made him a great beast." Other than his good appetite, he also spent his own money for other things.

Phoebe, on entering the shop, beheld there the already familiar face of the little devourer if we can reckon his mighty deeds aright

of Jim Crow, the elephant, the camel, the dromedaries, and the locomotive. Having expended his private fortune, on the two preceding days, in the purchase of the above unheard of luxuries, the young gentleman's present errand was on the part of his mother, in quest of three eggs and half a pound of raisins (Hawthorne, 1989).

Being a small boy, he not only devours everything, but also has his private money, even expands his private money on luxuries. In a nutshell, what Ned does almost every day is to satisfy his appetite. His good appetite, like greediness, serves for a purpose. This little trait of him suggests implicitly an alienated daily life in the capitalist era.

3. AESTHETIC SALVATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

According to Lefebvre's critique of Everyday life, the salvation of the alienation of everyday life lies also in everyday life. This everyday life in which salvation lie represents a kind of life that is seen as an artwork. Before him, everyday life tends to be considered inferior as compared with art. Lefebvre rejected strongly to that idea. He thought art and everyday should not ever be separated. Therefore, to him, to seek and find beauty in the alienated everyday life is the only way one can escape from the dull, monotonous and alienated everyday life.

From chapter seven to chapter fourteen, before Judge Pyncheon asks Clifford for the rest of the wealth, what the author depicts is almost the everyday life of Phoebe, Hepzibah, and Clifford, which takes such so big a part of the whole story. It seems that such lengthy narrative does not contribute much to the whole story. What role does it play thematically, then? The answer is quite simple. This part of everyday life, in a sense, is integral in that it is a representative of an aesthetical life.

This seemingly independent part begins with the appearance of a new character named Clifford. Clifford is, without a doubt, a very unique and crucial character. Clifford is a pathetic old man who has apparently suffered a lot. Despite his miserable sufferings, however, he is also a man of acute sensitivity to everything beautiful. He is depicted as follows: "The secret was, that an individual of his temper can always be pricked more acutely through his sense of the beautiful and harmonious than through his heart, and as follows (Hawthorne, 1989):

It could the more adequately be known that the soul of the man must have suffered some miserable wrong, from its earthly experience. There he seemed to sit, with a dim veil of decay and ruin betwixt him and the world, but through which, at fitting intervals, might be caught the same expression, so refined, so softly imaginative, which Malbone--venturing a happy touch, with suspended breath --had imparted to the miniature (Hawthorne, 1989)!

Clifford is a man who will be cheered up by all things that are beautiful ranging from Phoebe's beautiful appearance, to crimson rose, even a great meal. It certainly is no coincidence as well that Clifford is depicted as a man with sensibility of beauty. In that sense, Clifford's nature of seeing and seeking only the beautiful suggests the only salvation of an alienated life is an aesthetical life.

The beauty that Clifford want is utterly displayed in Phoebe, the beautiful girl who brings him happiness. Phoebe is evidently the key figure of this novel, because she symbolizes beauty and an aesthetical way of life, or we could say that Phoebe represents the embodiment of beauty and art. Before we begin our discussion, let's take a look what kind of a girl Phoebe is. Phoebe is an extremely beautiful girl coming from the countryside. She is depicted as having "young, blooming, and very cheerful face", and that "The young girl, so fresh, so unconventional, and yet so orderly and obedient to common rules, as you at once recognized her to be, was widely in contrast, at that moment, with everything about her." she also is energetic and a great talented singer.

Indeed, such was the native gush and play of her spirit, that she was seldom perfectly quiet and undemonstrative, any more than a fountain ever ceases to dimple and warble with its flow. She possessed the gift of song, and that, too, so naturally, that you would as little think of inquiring whence she had caught it, or what master had taught her, as of asking the same questions about a bird, in whose small strain of music we recognize the voice of the Creator as distinctly as in the loudest accents of his thunder (Hawthorne, 1989).

With Phoebe's accompany, vast change can be seen in both the house of the seven gables and the lives of Hepzibah and Clifford.

The grime and sordidness of the House of the Seven Gables seemed to have vanished since her appearance there; the gnawing tooth of the dry-rot was stayed among the old timbers of its skeleton frame; the dust had ceased to settle down so densely, from the antique ceilings, upon the floors and furniture of the rooms below (Hawthorne, 1989).

The once sad Clifford also is converted by Phoebe into someone else, whose situation is completely different than that of the sad and miserable man. It says in the novel: "Becoming habituated to her companionship, Clifford readily showed how capable of imbibing pleasant tints and gleams of cheerful light from all quarters his nature must originally have been^[3]." Phoebe's presence has greatly reshaped the situation of the house of the seven gables, and the everyday lives of Hepzibah and Clifford. The three of them has even developed a constant life style that is harmonious and happy.

Other than that, it is Phoebe who triggers Holgrave, who always seems indifferent to the world and to Hepzibah and Clifford to really care for them and speak out his mind. A sharp contrast is denoted right after Phoebe's departure. Both the house of the seven gables and the lives of Hepzibah and Clifford have gone back to their original state of degeneration, gray, dread and darkness. This contrast also denotes the great power of Phoebe, or the great power of art and beauty. It is also, in the absence of the power of Phoebe, the power of art and beauty, the embodiment of alienation, Judge Pyncheon, suddenly comes to Hepzibah and Clifford, asking for wealth. It is also interesting for us to observe the phenomenon that Judge Pyncheon, whose intention of asking for wealth must always remain constant, also makes a visit to them in the presence of Phoebe, without asking for wealth. Such contrast suggests strongly the suppression capability of art and beauty for alienation.

Eventually, in the last several chapters, after Judge Pyncheon's mysterious death, the Alice's Posies were "flaunting in rich beauty and full bloom today, and seemed, as it were, a mystic expression that something within the house was consummated." Phoebe comes back from her home, the little store is shut down. It is also, at the peak of this very incident, something extraordinary happens, which is the love of Holgrave and Phoebe. Their love at the time of the dreadful event has made everything beautiful again.

And it was in this hour, so full of doubt and awe, that the one miracle was wrought, without which every human existence is a blank. The bliss which makes all things true, beautiful, and holy shone around this youth and maiden. They were conscious of nothing sad nor old. They transfigured the earth, and made it Eden again, and themselves the two first dwellers in it (Hawthorne, 1989).

Their bond, depicted as the flower of Eden, symbolizes the peak of the aesthetical human daily life. A happy ending is also displayed. Hepzibah, Clifford, Holgrave and Phoebe, leave the ancient house to live in the Judge's country home. Hepzibah closes the cent-shop, going back to being a "lady". Clifford now can view only what is beautiful. A happy life awaits for everybody in the near future. The death of Judge Pyncheon and the shut down cent-shop and that Judge Pyncheon's fortune is inherited by Hepzibah and Clifford suggest the fall of a alienation life, and the rise of a more happy life with aesthetical value in which, without Judge Pyncheon,

without the need to earn a living, they can live happily after.

Lastly, the ending suggests the triumph of the aesthetical everyday life over the alienated everyday life concerning only with money, real estate, and greediness. In terms of theme, if the alienation of everyday life is the thesis, then the aesthetical everyday life is the antithesis. The only salvation to the alienation of everyday life can only be the art and beauty of everyday life.

4. CONCLUSION

The House of the Seven Gables was considered by Hawthorne himself the best novel of him. Indeed, this novel has touched upon alienation of everyday life and the aesthetical salvation of it in the form of a perfect Gothic story. As a superstructure, it also shows ideologies and other social information. Such a fascinating story is in dire need of further great and concrete researches.

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