



## Resistance to Change: Hephzibah and Clifford in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* as Two Case Studies

### RESISTANCE AU CHANGEMENT : "LA MAISON AUX SEPT PIGNONS" DEUX CAS D'ETUDE DE HEPHZIBAH ET CLIFFORD DE NATHANIEL NAWTHORNE

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#### Abstract

It is argued that change is a necessity, that it's connected with time, that it is either for the better or the worse, and that some people of whom Hephzibah and Clifford in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* are ones sometimes resist change for certain reasons. The discussion demonstrates that Hephzibah and Clifford resist change in defiance of time and reality. They both imprison themselves in the past and refuse to live in the real world. This refusal to change occurs due to identity-related reasons, the loss of certain interests, fear of the unknown, the threat to their security and survival, and its being imposed upon them. This paper shows that change is a fact of life and that it occurs daily in subtle ways whether we like it or not. In line with this contention, people should cope with it, and come to terms with the past and the present whose disregard is a sign of folly.

**Key words:** Resistance; Reluctance ; Necessity; Imprison; Reality; Imposed; Collapse

#### Résumé

Il est soutenu que le changement est une nécessité, qu'il est connecté avec le temps, qu'il est soit pour le meilleur ou le pire, et que certaines personnes dont Hephzibah et Clifford dans Hawthorne La Maison aux sept pignons sont ceux parfois résistent au changement pour certains raisons. La discussion montre que Hephzibah et Clifford résister au changement, au mépris du temps et la réalité. Ils ont tous deux se sont emprisonner dans le passé et refusent de vivre dans le monde réel. Ce refus de changer est due à des raisons liées à l'identité, la perte de certains intérêts, la peur de l'inconnu, la menace pour leur sécurité et leur survie, et son cours qui leur sont imposées. Ce doc-

ument montre que le changement est une réalité de la vie et qu'il se produit tous les jours de façon subtile que cela nous plaise ou non. En accord avec cette affirmation, les gens devraient faire face, et se réconcilier avec le passé et le présent dont le mépris est un signe de folie.

**Mots clés:** Résistance, La réticence; Nécessité; Emprisonner; Réalité; Imposées; Réduire

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Change is the law of life, and it is a daily occurrence. We hear every day about the weather change, the stock change, the change of seasons, etc. As long as humans are not an exception, they equally change. They change physically as they are subject to change. Being capable of initiating change, they change the way they live, their feelings, opinions and beliefs. Commenting on this change, Carlyle (2010) holds that

"[t]oday is not yesterday; we ourselves change; how can Works and Thoughts, if they are always to be the fittest, continue always the same? Change, indeed, is painful, yet needful" (39).

Carlyle is saying a mouthful. Change is needful to make life challenging, to evade boredom, to make progress, and to pave the way for a better life. Without change, life becomes boring and unbearable.

To make life pleasant, humans should initiate change. Humans sometimes willingly change jobs, parks, theaters, museums, cinemas and schools with the purpose of trying something new. When they do so, they maintain control of their lives. They don't resist this change because it is the fruit of their choices. For this reason, they move forward with this change as long as the losses to be experienced

are predictable. The moment they become uncertain of the losses to be experienced, they resist change, especially if it is imposed upon them. This variety of change that comes from without occurs all the time, yet a number of people of whom Hephzibah and Clifford in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* are ones find it difficult to adapt. Hawthorne provides much information showing what happens when change is resisted and how they both arrange for not letting the outside world in and maintaining their life as it is. Acting in accordance with this agenda, Hephzibah tries hard to stop Phoebe from staying for a long time in the Pyncheons' house when the latter pays them a visit. Astonished to see a young girl whom she takes to be Phoebe, Hephzibah wonders, "... But what does she want here? And how like a country cousin to come down upon a poor body in this way, without so much as a day's notice, or asking whether she would be welcome!" (75). After meditating upon this matter, she claims, "Well; she must have a night's lodging, I suppose; and tomorrow the child shall go back to her mother!" (75). Unbolting the door to let her in, Hephzibah adds, "No! She can stay only one night." "If Clifford were to find her here, it might disturb him" (75). Reluctant to change, Hephzibah and Clifford keep themselves insulated against the world of change, the present, which is to them, Al-Shalabi holds in *The House as Container: Architecture in The House of the Seven Gables*, "as burdensome as the past" (6). This insulation marks Hephzibah and Clifford's defiance of time and reality. They both imprison themselves in the house and live secluded. In his description of Hephzibah, Hawthorne claims that "for above quarter of a century" she "has dwelt in strict seclusion, taking no part in the business of life, and just as little in its intercourse and pleasures" (41). Like Hephzibah, Clifford "has had but little sunshine in his life" (104). Impacted by seclusion, he becomes a "wasted, gray, melancholy figure ... a material ghost" (106). Recognizing this transformation, Clifford comments on its impact on his life and his sister's. He contends, "We are ghosts! We have no right - no right anywhere, but in this old house" (169). In this capacity, they have no contact with people in the world of reality from which they are both detached and of which they have the same opinion. Clifford, for instance, rejects "the idea of personal contact with the world" (156). Similarly, Hephzibah is having trouble with, Al-Shalabi maintains in "The House as Container: Architecture in The House of the Seven Gables," "accepting the idea of working at the cent-shop to earn her living" (7).

These attitudes spring from something within. Hephzibah and Clifford are opposed to changing their class though aristocracy has collapsed. This refusal to recognize the change that has become of their class is ascribed to a number of reasons. Firstly, Hephzibah and Clifford, like other humans, reject change because they are against all that is new, different, and unknown. They fear the un-

known and find it difficult to stop doing something they have been used to doing. Arguing in support of this view, De Jigger (2001) claims that "[m]ost people are reluctant to leave the familiar behind. We are all suspicious about the unfamiliar; we are naturally concerned about how we will get from the old to the new, especially if it involves learning something new and risking failure" (24). Hephzibah and Clifford have been so far upper class people. The collapse of aristocracy is something new and unfamiliar to them. Suspicious of the unfamiliar, they are unready to accept the change of their class. They probably feel that embracing the unknown is something of a risk they are too old to take. Secondly, Clifford and Hephzibah resist changing their class on account of fear. This fear is associated with losing their status as aristocrats, which is conducive to their plunging down into the parade of life in the street. Thirdly, Hephzibah and Clifford resist change because it represents a threat to their safety, security, or survival. They think that maintaining their status is a prerequisite for their being safe. Having lived secluded for a long time, they may not be able to deal with others and live comfortably. Fourthly, Hephzibah and Clifford object to changing to maintain their identity. The house with the seven gables where they live has been both built and inhabited by the Pyncheons. This means that the house is a marker of their identity. If Clifford and Hephzibah change their class, they may leave the house with the seven gables and live somewhere else.

Thus, they lose their identity because the place where they live defines this identity. If they live, for instance, in a forest, they will certainly lose their identity because the forest, being a no man's land, does lack identity. Commenting on the intimate relationship between place and identity, Twigg-Ross (2003) claims that places are important sources of identity elements. Repeating the same argument, Cuba and Hummon (1993) as well as Hay (1998) contend that places imbued with personal, social and cultural meaning provide a framework within which personal identity is constructed. Fifthly, Hephzibah and Clifford are opposed to change because it is imposed on them. They have not initiated it. Were this change initiated, they wouldn't resist it. They would describe this experience as exciting. Sixthly, they resist change because things are uncertain and unpredictable. For this reason, they feel amiss and reluctant to move forward with the change of their class on account of the to-be-experienced losses that are not obvious. With other sorts of change, such as changing a job or moving house, the losses are quite obvious. As long as Hephzibah and Clifford are unable to know what the future holds for them, they resist change.

This resistance occurs though they have witnessed many changes happening during their lifetime. The deaths of Colonel Pyncheon, Matthew Maule, Alice Pyncheon, and Judge Pyncheon are good examples of these changes.

Other examples are the changes that become of hens and of Maule's well. While hens stop laying eggs, water in Maule's well becomes salty. Despite these numerous changes, Hepzibah and Clifford hardly notice the passage of time. They grow older, but continue to live as they always do. In spite of the change which has become of their bodies, they refuse to change their social class. They seem to be like the Pyncheons' house that is worn down. In his description of this house, Hawthorne contends, "The House of the Seven Gables, antique as it now looks, was not the first habitation erected by civilized man on precisely the same spot of ground" (20). He also adds, "There it rose, a little withdrawn from the line of the street" (24). Living secluded, Hepzibah and Clifford rarely leave this house which people seldom enter. They are old, isolated, and as stubborn as the house is.

Despite their stubbornness and tenacity of the past, Hepzibah and Clifford fail to resolve their problem with change. They flee the present, but change keeps occurring. It does not stop. It is something beyond their reach. Though they find it immensely difficult to take the steps needed to create a better life, they should give up the dread of the unknown and maintain their hope in the future that is to come. They should accept change because it paves the way for progress. They should also change and be part of this change because the outer world is changing. It is much better for them to change and try something new than to remain in their hopeless situation. Only thus can they be in harmony with the ever-changing material world.

I have demonstrated that change is the law of life, that it keeps happening whether we like it or not, that it is be-

yond the reach of humans, and that it makes life challenging. I have also shown that humans are not in a position to stop or flee it, and that the best thing for them to do is not to resist it but embrace it and cope with it... This act of embracing change may seem to be easy. In reality it is a real challenge to embrace an unknown change, and it is the duty of those who embrace change not only to meet the challenge but also make the best of the change coming their way.

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