The Freedom of a Broken Law: The Liminal World of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter"

Tonia Lanette Horton
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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"The Freedom of a Broken Law"

The Liminal World of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

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Tonia L. Horton
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Jovia Lanette Horton

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Robert Schlimmick
English

Richard Grusin
English

Bruce A. McConachie
Theatre
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For My Pearls

Douglas, Annette, Michael, Netty, and especially Mark
ABSTRACT

Of the characters in The Scarlet Letter, Pearl Prynne remains the proverbial thorn in the side of Hawthorne criticism. Little attempt has been made to address the totality of her character which would provide an interpretation not only for her enigmatic behavior, but for the problematic nature of Hawthorne's "Romance" as well. Through the use of the anthropological model of "liminality" identified by Arnold van Gennep and developed by Victor Turner as a ritual "middle" stage in psychological, social, and even cultural, rites of passage, the "Romance" as a dialectical "neutral territory" is defined as a ground of potentiality free from societal constraints in which new formulations of character and culture may emerge.

Such a character is Pearl Prynne. The generic traits of the little girl, who is a "born outcast of the infantile world" (SL, 70), the "living hieroglyph" (SL, 148) of her parents's adulterous and self-consecrated love, are those of ambiguity, disorder, conflict, chaos, and contrariety. Her world is a liminal world arising from the premise that "a great law had been broken" (SL, 68). By casting Pearl in the terms of a liminal being, this essay seeks to ameliorate the gaps in past critical thinking about her character. This is achieved by first, examining her genesis as a character in Hawthorne's observations of his children Una and Julian, as recorded in The American Notebooks; and second, with the application of anthropological concepts central to liminality such as "anti-structure," communitas, and symbolic inversion to Pearl's behavior, dress, child dramas, her remarkable intuitive powers as a "contrary," and the final resolution of her character.
"There is no law, nor reverence for authority, no regard for human ordinances or opinions, right or wrong, mixed up with that child's composition," remarked he (Chillingworth), as much to himself as to his companion. "I saw her, the other day, bespatter the Governor himself with water, at the cattle-trough in Spring Lane. What, in Heaven's name, is she? Is the imp altogether evil? Hath she affections? Hath she any discoverable principle of being?"

"None,—save the freedom of a broken law," answered Mr. Dimmesdale, in a quiet way, as if he had been discussing the point within himself. "Whether capable of good, I know not."

Nathaniel Hawthorne,  
The Scarlet Letter
It is no small coincidence that, upon being given the assignment in a graduate seminar to apply some form of anthropological concept to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, my first inclination was to reacquaint myself with the theories of the American anthropologist and social theorist, Victor Turner. During the course of an undergraduate degree in the History of Religions which focused primarily on Native American cultures, I was exposed to Turner's theories at every turn, and developed a profound respect for the range and profundity of his pronouncements on such interrelated areas as social drama, myth, symbol, and most significantly, rites of passage. In the two years that I was engaged in intensive study of Native American myth, ritual, and symbol, Turner was among a handful of scholars who did not overtly, or covertly, assign indigenous ("primitive," "preindustrial") systems to an inferior status when compared to the "high articulation" in the Western and Oriental systems. Victor Turner willingly allowed and even elaborated theoretical models for the legitimation of radical symbolic forms of disorder, chaos, subversion, inversion, ambiguity, and a whole host of "anti-s" as valid and necessary in their own right. In particular, I was struck by Turner's elaboration of Arnold van Gennep's theory of "liminality," the crucial phase in the dynamics of rites of passage: rites in which transition from one orderly status to another evolves through a phase of disorder, antimony, the chaotic loosening of all former taboos, laws, and constraints, and resulting in an extraordinary freedom.
When I began to delve into Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, as well as his theory of the romance, the parallels with Turner's theories of liminality were striking. From his broadest definition of "romance" to his characterization of Pearl, Hawthorne's metaphors relating to a middle ground of potentiality -- "neutral territory,"^2 "another state of being" (*SL*, 61), "freedom of a broken law" (*SL*, 91) -- are pervasive. As this thesis contends, the consideration of Hawthorne's art as exemplary of an idea such as liminality is significant for a reading of his work in that it will not try to judge, resolve, (or beg the question of "ambiguity," which I am now convinced the "A" represents), or oppose the complexities and contradictions inherent in Hawthorne's thematic treatment of sin, evil, the past, and alienation. Instead, it proposes that consideration be given to the idea that, without the need to resolve Hawthorne's conflicts, one can truly appreciate his artistic notions of the "neutral territory" and its characters such as the antinomic Pearl Prynne, and view both the work and its characters in their totality. The application of Turner's model is an alternative to traditional literary criticism, and as such, should be seen as experimental. Guided by the above premise, this essay will focus on the elaboration of van Gennep and Turner's theories of passage, especially the liminal stage, and the application of the concept of liminality to Hawthorne's theory of romance and to the specific delineation of the character of Pearl Prynne.
In writing to his friend, Horatio Bridge, after the completion of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne described the tale as "positively a h-ll-fired story, in which I found it almost impossible to throw any cheering light." Indeed, the story had already sent Mrs. Hawthorne to bed with a headache and a broken heart, both of which indicated to Hawthorne that he had achieved "a triumphant success" in his authorial purposes. However, judging by Mrs. Hawthorne's simplistic reduction of the book's theme as expressed in her correspondence to Mary Mann a week later ("I do not know what you will think of the Romance. It is most powerful & contains a moral as terrible and stunning as a thunder bolt. It shows that the Law cannot be broken."), Hawthorne's exuberance may have been premature. His letter to Bridge hinted at an exclusivity of appeal and understanding ("my writings do not, nor ever will, appeal to the broadest class of sympathies, and therefore will not attain a very wide popularity") which hinged on a complexity presuming no simple answers to the existential dilemmas of his characters. Even in the first chapter of the romance, Hawthorne had set the insoluble character of the story's conflict. Speaking of the presence of a rose-bush "so directly on the threshold of our narrative," Hawthorne offered it to his audience with merely a suggestion that "it may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (SL, 40; emphasis mine).

In an earlier letter to his editor, J. T. Fields, Hawthorne asserted that "by turning different sides of the same dark idea
to the reader's eye, it will weary very many people." To suggest that this "same dark idea" might be Mrs. Hawthorne's "moral" that "the Law cannot be broken" is unfair to Hawthorne's assiduous efforts to construct a story that could not be reduced to a simple black-and-white moral scheme. In fact, it was Hawthorne's distinction as a romancer to have achieved the literary awareness that "while the diffuseness of human experience was simplified in the romance, the quality of the writer's argument about the selected elements of experience could still be very complex." Hawthorne's "dark idea," if anything, was the tragic nature of his psychological soundings of the nature of experience in the New World.

The Scarlet Letter is quite emphatically an expression of tragic consciousness, predicated on the conflict between the "consecration" (SL, 140) of private love and the "iron framework" (SL, 91) of Puritan society which maintained the contractual primacy of communal law regarding human relationships. Literally, the "scarlet letter" is the badge of lifelong ignominy, the "A" which Hester Prynne is commanded to wear for her adulterous liaison with the exalted Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, who does not publicly acknowledge his role in the affair until shortly before his death. The child born of the relationship, Pearl, is "the material union and spiritual idea" (SL, 148) of an act which simultaneously represents individual liberty in love and sexuality, and a transgression of the limits of communal order as defined by Puritan morality. Shamed by the community, Hester and Pearl live in exile on the outskirts of town. Pearl, more dramatically than any other character, represents the outlaw, and is
"a born outcast of the infantile world" (SL, 70) whose existence arose from the perception that "a great law had been broken" (SL, 68). As a "living hieroglyph" (SL, 148) of disorder, conflict, and contrariety, Pearl represents Hawthorne's individual estranged from humanity, due to the alienation of her illegitimate birth which was condemned by Puritan moral order.

The optimism of such popular notions as "Open West," "Young America," "Manifest Destiny" and in the "fable of the American Adam" presented itself as illusion to Hawthorne. He translated the idea of unlimited freedom and potentiality into a situation of crisis regarding "ethical reality" coeval with the tension between "the solitary hero and the alien tribe", and the "inevitable doubleness" in the relationship. R. W. B. Lewis's American Adam, symbolic of the "act of rebirth in a new land," was contrived to exemplify the "legend of a historic rite of passage dedicated to the initiation of a whole people into revived and purified existence." But for Hawthorne, whose recurrent psychological themes were those of the alien individual isolated from human community, the approach to the American Adam as protagonist was fraught with disillusionment. Arising from the consciousness that the "hero's" position was one which presumed neither a "fundamental innocence" nor a "moral position ...prior to experience," a Hawthorne character ("heroine") such as Hester Prynne was destined to undergo passage into a state of exile from society, and her daughter never to know any other relationship with that society but that of alienation. As R. W. B. Lewis defined this passage, "the valid rite of initiation for the individual in the
new world is not an initiation into society, but given the character of society, an initiation away from it: something I wish it were legitimate to call denitiation."  

By "turning different sides of the same dark idea" in the "neutral territory," (SL, 31) of the romance of The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne leads us not so much to an interpretation characterized by "ambiguity" as to one assuming a dialectical nature; that is, one which provides for a creative space in which to debate the premises of order and chaos, freedom and limitation. To the Transcendalist assumption that there was a "oneness of multiplicity," Hawthorne's moral imagination replied "No! in thunder" with an awareness of "tragedy, irony, and multidinous distinctions." Utilizing the author's role as artist in formulating an imaginative response to "the esthetic possibilities of radical forms of alienation, contradiction, and disorder," Hawthorne conceived the debate in the symbolic forms of his characters. These characters, such as Pearl Prynne, signified the inherent existence of patterns of reversal and change, "escape and return," "structure and anti-structure," and "good and evil" and their manifestation in culture.

'In Betwixt and Between': Liminality and Hawthorne's Romance

Seven years before the publication of The Scarlet Letter in 1850, Hawthorne's understanding of his role as a romancer was already self-evident: "It is only through the medium of the imagination that we can loosen those iron fetters, which we call truth and reality, and make ourselves even partially sensible of what prisoners we are." The title of the essay in which this
appeared, "The New Adam and Eve," is highly suggestive of his revision of the American Adam's mythic rebirth in the New World, and the inevitability of the Fall, the return to "iron fetters." Even more important, however, was Hawthorne's suggestion of the imagination as a middle ground unrestrained by the dictates of "truth" and "reality" -- an interim world where an unfettered exploration of the human predicament ("prisoners") could occur. Throughout his writings, especially in the prefaces to his major works, Hawthorne insisted upon a separate reality, a "theatre a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel,"26 "a sort of poetic or fairy precinct"27 as a valid and necessary environment for his fictive dramas. In this argument for a domain freed from history ("truth" and "reality") Hawthorne distinctly approximated the twentieth-century social and anthropological concept of "liminality"28 as explored by such scholars as Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner.

In Les Rites des Passage (1906), the concept of liminality was first articulated by van Gennep, a colleague of Emile Durkheim. Van Gennep's predominant concern as an anthropologist was the study of ritual life and its patterns with particular regard to the idea of "transition," which he viewed as inherent in the human situation:

The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another...progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts.... Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages.29

The disturbances or "life crises"30 which either precipitated or resulted from transition were mediated, for van Gennep, by rites
of passage. In spite of their multiplicity of forms, these rites were "ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another, or from one cosmic or social world to another."\(^{31}\)

Within the conceptual framework of the rites of passage, van Gennep had differentiated three dominant phases: separation or "preliminal," transition or "liminal," and incorporation or "postliminal."\(^{32}\) This delineation of ritual phases constituted a theoretical advance in anthropological thinking. The implications of an idea such as liminality, however, remained to be formulated by the contemporary American anthropologist and social theorist, Victor Turner. In particular, Turner elaborates on van Gennep's definition of the three phases by concentrating on the key word in his scheme: "liminal," from \textit{limen}, the Latin "threshold" (DFM, 232).

For Turner, liminality represents a moment when those being moved in accordance with a cultural script were liberated from normative demands, when they were, indeed, betwixt and between successive lodgments in jural political systems...in this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen (DFM, 13).

In its simplest form, liminality refers to "any condition outside or on the peripheries of everyday life...[and is] often a sacred condition or can readily become one (DFM, 47). The liminal world is "betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life" (DFM, 53).

Turner's theoretical model of liminality includes two other symbolic manifestations of the liminal state: anti-structure and \textit{communitas}. The first, anti-structure, emerges from the "gap," the liminal space saturated with potentiality, symbolizing "at once a negation and an affirmation of another order of things and
relations" (DFM, 196). Anti-structure implies a new order of experience, "in which all previous standards and models are subjected to criticism, and fresh new ways of describing sociocultural experience are formulated" (DFM, 15). In its creative function, anti-structure is "a positive, generative center" (DFM, 273) for new expressions of culture.

A second factor in the model of liminality is that of **communitas**, which is a direct correlate of anti-structure:

Structure, all that which holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their actions, is one pole in a charged field, for which the opposite pole is **communitas**, the egalitarian 'sentiment for humanity'...representing the desire for a total unmediated relationships between person and person, a relationship which nevertheless does not submerge one in the other but safeguards their uniqueness in the very act of revealing their commonness...it liberates them from conformity to general norms. (DFM, 271)

Communitas "transgresses or dissolves" institutional or structural definitions of human relationships, and by doing so, invests the new bonds with a tremendous potency and immediacy of emotional impact. It is held as "sacred or holy" in its own right.

In introducing anti-structure and **communitas** into this discussion, it is tempting to begin drawing parallels between these conditions and the ideas and symbolic actions dramatized by Hawthorne's characters and plot in *The Scarlet Letter*. However, in order to substantiate the claim for liminality in *The Scarlet Letter*, it is judicious at this point to examine Hawthorne's theory of romance and its relationship to a liminal model.

In his statements in "A New Adam and Eve," Hawthorne unequivocally
invested the imagination with the power to challenge both "truth" and "reality," the "iron fetters" stifling human perception. The challenge was to gain an element of "distance" from the reality of history and human experience. In his preface to The House of the Seven Gables in 1851, Hawthorne explained the romance as being critically endangered by being forced "to bring his fancy-pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment." When compared to the "ordinary and probable course of man's experience" which is the proper "composition" of the "Novel," Hawthorne's defense of the "mingling" of the "Marvelous" and his manipulation of "atmospherical mediums as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture" (HSG, 1) constituted an argument for the dehistoricization of the romance as an art form. Indeed, his final sentence in the preface was quite clear in this respect: "the book may be read strictly as a Romance, having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead, than any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex" (HSG, 3).

For Hawthorne, dehistoricization alone did not produce the viable romance, which he described in the preface to The Blithedale Romance as essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact -- thus offering an available foothold between fiction and reality" (BR, 2). In the metaphor of the day-dream, one is reminded of Hawthorne's description of such a state in "The Haunted Mind": "You have found an intermediate space, where the business of life does not intrude; where the passing moment lingers, and becomes truly the present; a spot where Father Time, when he thinks nobody is watching him, sits down by the wayside
to take a breath."³⁷

Central to Hawthorne's definition of the romance, therefore, was the critical assertion of "an intermediate space," a world "betwixt and betwen" the "ordered worlds" (DFM, passim) of normative existence — a world where Hawthorne could create without the constraints of being in "too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives" (BR, 1). In the prefaces to both The Blithedale Romance and The Marble Faun, Hawthorne conveyed this separate world as a "fairy land" (BR, 2), "a sort of poetic or fairy precinct" (MF, 3), "a suitable remoteness" (BR, 2) with "an atmosphere of strange enchantment beheld through which the individuals have a propriety of their own" (BR, 2). Hawthorne was uncompromising in his demand that romantic characterization allow "the creatures of his brain [to] play their phantasmagorical antics (BR, 2) in exemption of normative demands of reality:

This atmosphere is what the American romancer needs. In its absence, the beings of imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals; a necessity that generally renders the paint and pasteboard of their composition but too painfully discernible (BR, 2).

Hawthorne's understanding of the necessity of a mode which would allow "phantasmagorical antics" showed his willingness to accept the existence of interstices "between possibility, probability, and present."³⁸

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, there recurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination -- and the laws of the world then
remain what they are; or else the event has
indeed taken place, it is an integral part of
reality -- but then this reality is controlled
by laws unknown to us. 39

Hawthorne's efforts to depict the romance as a "theatre"
led him to that of "moonlight in a familiar room" (SL, 30 ),
described in the quintessential Hawthorne passage on the nature
of the romance contained in the "Custom-House" preface to The
Scarlet Letter. It is here that

our familiar room has become a neutral territory,
somewhere between the real world and fairy-land,
where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and
each infuse itself with the nature of the other.
(SL, 31; emphasis mine)

The room itself has undergone a transformation by the transmutation
of physical normalcy by the agents of moonlight and the light of
"the somewhat dim coal fire" (SL, 31) such that no object has been
left untouched. The characters, heretofore "illusive guests" in
the mundane realities of the apartment, are enticed and "summoned
up" by an environment which is conducive to their creation, produced
by the "mingling" of moonlight and firelight. The combination of the
two elements results in a romantic portrait "with one remove further
from the actual, and nearer to the imaginative" (SL, 31).

In reference to the architectural underpinnings of Hawthorne's
romantic environment, van Gennep's scheme of rites of passage based
on the idea of limen, or "threshold," is again suggestive of an
interpretation of Hawthorne's artifice. For van Gennep, the idea of
transition is linked to the idea of "spatial passage...
expressed in such ritualization of movements from one status to
another as an "opening of doors." 40 This "territorial passage" 41
through "doors" or "portals" is highly symbolic, for in crossing a threshold one has "unite[d] oneself with a new world": whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds (emphasis mine).

Van Gennep's identification of transition with actual spatial passage and his correlation of architectural boundaries ("doors," "portals" and his belief that "a society is similar to a house divided into rooms and corridors") with mental or spiritual boundaries is unusually significant with regard to Hawthorne's preface to The Scarlet Letter.

Hawthorne's descriptions of the "Custom House" as "a spacious edifice of brick" (SL, 7) with references to long passages, divided rooms, large windows, and unfinished second stories could easily be dismissed as minutiae by a reader eager to launch into the narrative of Hester Prynne. In doing so, however, certain important manifestations of Hawthorne's purposeful artistic direction toward the main story would be lost. Hawthorne's mundane existence as a public servant is spatially centered on the ground floor of the Custom-House, where office windows link him with the realm of the "ordinary and probable course of human experience" (HSG, 3):

its arched windows commanding a view of aforesaid dilapidated wharf...a narrow lane...a portion of Derby Street...glimpses of the shops of grocers, block-makers, slop-sellers, and ship-chandlers; around the doors of which are generally to be seen, laughing and gossiping, clusters of old salts, and other such wharf-rats as haunt the Wapping of a seaport (SL, 9).
In passing from the ground floor to the second story, a metaphorical passage from the ordinary to the extra-ordinary, a large room is discovered: the space that will generate Hawthorne's romance. In this room, Hawthorne finds the "documents" of a "Surveyor Pue" that will lead to his revival as an author, as well as the material for the story of The Scarlet Letter. The physical description of the room is reminiscent of an "intermediate space" that so appealed to Hawthorne:

The edifice — originally projected on a scale adapted to the old commercial enterprise of the port, and with an idea of subsequent prosperity destined never to be realized — contains far more space than its occupants know what to do with. This airy hall, therefore...remains unfinished to this day, and in spite of the aged cobwebs that festoon its dusky beams, appears still to await the labor of carpenter and mason (SL, 25).

Once Hawthorne has entered the room and opened the package, his artistic sympathies and inclinations are aroused:

...on Hester Prynne's story, therefore, I bestowed much thought. It was the subject of my meditations for many an hour, while pacing to and fro across my room, or traversing with a hundredfold repetition, the long extent from the front-door of the Custom-House to the side entrance, and back again. (SL, 29)

The mere possession of the documents, however, does not release Hawthorne from his "wretched numbness" (SL, 30) brought on by his employment at the Custom-House. He seeks the activation of "an entire class of susceptibilities, and a gift connected with them" (SL, 31) by exposing himself to "that invigorating charm of Nature, which used to give me such freshness and activity of thought, the moment that I stepped across the threshold of the Old Manse"(SL, 30; emphasis mine). Finally, it is through a
political "rite of passage," the election of Zachary Taylor, that Hawthorne's tenure at the Custom-House is ended. By crossing the threshold of the Custom-House for the last time, he becomes a "real human being...again a literary man" (SL, 36).

The allusion to the most ominous threshold in *The Scarlet Letter* is found in the introductory chapter, "The Prison-Door." Hawthorne's description of the door from which Hester and Pearl are soon to emerge into shame and exile is foreboding: "heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes...the rust on the ponderous iron-work of its oaken door looked more antique than anything else in the new world" (SL, 39). The only bright spot in this entire scene is "a wild rose-bush" on "one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold" (SL, 39; emphasis mine). Hawthorne concludes his staging of the story's opening by transporting the "rose" from its seventeenth-century Puritan setting to a nineteenth-century context, that of his reader:

Finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that inauspicious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers and present it to the reader (SL, 40).

In doing so, Hawthorne extends an invitation to his audience to cross the threshold into the liminal world of his romance.

**The Freedom of a Broken Law: Pearl Prynne**

Hawthorne's rejection of the novel as an art form conceived in the quotidian, the "ordinary and probable course of man's experience" (HSG, 3), was crucial to his demand that the romance be released from
the expectations of the world of "truth" and "validity."\textsuperscript{45}

This is not to say that Hawthorne's subject matter was not important for society at large. What it did signify, however, was the justification for a type of artistic passage, a transition from the realm of structure and predictable event to that of a world latent with potentiality, a liminal state. Given such "a foothold between fiction and reality," (BR, 2), Hawthorne's penchant for examining human dilemmas from different points of view, as is the case with the issue of "freedom" and "good and evil" in The Scarlet Letter, could be satisfied without the compelling necessity for a single resolution or conclusion. Hawthorne's skillful use of an artifice "in betwixt and between" total realism and total fantasy, "the Actual and the Imaginary" (SL, 31) to "summon up" his characters resulted in a striking cast of characters in The Scarlet Letter: Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, and the seminal character in this discussion of liminality, Pearl Prynne.

It is not surprising to find a broad range of scholarly opinions on Pearl, surely one of the most enigmatic creatures in American literature, as seen in Barbara Garlitz's survey of the criticism, "Pearl: 1850-1955."\textsuperscript{46} Even in the admission that "criticism of Pearl almost forces one to conclude that her character is an unfathomable maze, or of such an involved richness that it can become all things to all men,"\textsuperscript{47} Garlitz does not exempt Pearl's critics from the judgement that the major fallibility in the body of criticism is not simply the shifts in the history of ideas (especially the changing opinion on "childhood"), but that "most
critics have not considered the complexities; rather, they have isolated things Hawthorne says about Pearl or taken one aspect of her personality for the whole" (emphasis mine). This is especially true in writers such as Hawthorne's son, Julian, who makes the case for Pearl as "a beautiful but poisonous flower" in her "incarnation of sin." His polar opposite, Darrel Abel, interprets Pearl as a "child of Nature" akin to Wordsworth's "Lucy." In Abel's study is seen the bias toward the "sinless child," typical of views ascribing to "Rousseauian natural goodness." Even Garlitz, who astutely canvasses Pearl criticism and is able to find its major patterns, cannot seem to escape from trying to resolve Pearl's guilt, sin, and innocence -- in short, her moral posture -- as if it totally accounts for her significance in the story:

Pearl is a mixture of Hawthorne's sober observation of childhood and of his continuing belief in the sinless child. In accounting for Pearl's character, the physiological psychology of the period must have appealed to Hawthorne; for it enabled him to shift the responsibility for her evil to Hester, to make her originally innocent but the victim of an unusually faulty inheritance.

While such overt moral emphases do not seem to prevail in more recent critics such as Dorena A. Wright and Gloria Ehrlich, their assessment of Pearl still smacks of scholarly reduction. For Wright, Pearl's humanity is virtually ignored (despite the author's claims to the contrary) in pursuit of her symbolic affinity with Dante's Beatrice and the anonymous 14th century English poem, "Pearl," affinities which purport to explain Pearl's role in metaphorically bringing Dimmesdale to his knees. Gloria
Ehrlich also links Pearl's significance as a character to Dimmesdale: "Pearl's eldritch quality stems directly from the intensity of her search for paternal recognition."\(^{56}\)

In light of such critical shortcomings, this interpretation of Pearl seeks to establish her not only as a character worthy in her own right (without having to link her to Hester or Dimmesdale), but also as representative of a certain totality in The Scarlet Letter: the liminal world into which she is born and which characterizes her as human and as symbol, and her passage from that world. In emerging from the liminal state, Pearl is the only character in The Scarlet Letter with hope for a happy future.

Hawthorne's characterization of Pearl as a child stemmed, in large part, from his observations of his two children, Una and Julian, during the years 1847-1850, evidenced in direct correspondence with his journal entries during those years. Although Hawthorne's description rambles at times, it is clear that he viewed his recording of their behavior as significant to his literary arsenal:

> It is with children, as Mr. Emerson, or somebody else, says it is with nature -- you cannot see them so well when you look at them of set purpose.\(^{57}\) The best manifestations must take you unaware.

Hawthorne's daughter Una provided much of the foundation for Pearl as a composite of contradictory elements. In Pearl's physical beauty ("by its perfect shape...the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden" (SL, 68), her "outward mutability" (SL, 68), her "aspect...imbued with a spell of infinite variety," (SL, 68), and the claim that "in this one child there were
many children" (SL, 68), Hawthorne's observations of Una show quite clearly the origin of Pearl's attributes:

Her beauty is the most flitting, transitory, most uncertain and unaccountable affair, that ever had a real existence; it beams out when nobody expects it; it has mysteriously passed away, when you think yourself sure of it;—if you glance sideways at her, you perhaps think it is illuminating her face, but, turning full round to enjoy it, it is gone again....When really visible, it is rare and precious as the vision of an angel; it is a transfiguration—a grace, delicacy, an ethereal fineness, which...on these occasions, we see her real soul...But, in truth, one manifestation belongs to her as much as another; for, before the establishment of principles, what is character but the series and succession of moods?

Judging by his often negative and harsh criticism of her (most of which Sophia Hawthorne attempted to suppress in the publication of the Notebooks), Una's disposition often provided torment to Hawthorne. Just as Hester Prynne "looked fearfully into the child's expanding nature, ever dreading to detect some dark and wild peculiarity" (SL, 67-68) which would indicate Pearl's evil nature as a result of her own "evil deed" (SL, 67), Hawthorne expresses his concern at discovering "evil" in his daughter:

...there is something that almost frightens me about the child—I know not whether elfish or angelic, but, at all events, supernatural. She steps so boldly into the midst of everything, seems at times to have but little delicacy, and anon shows that she possesses the finest essence of it; now so hard, now so tender; now so perfectly unreasonable, soon again so wise...I now and then catch an aspect of her, in which I cannot believe her to be my own human child, but a spirit strangely mingled with good and evil, haunting the house where I dwell. The little boy is always the same child...."
In one passage Hawthorne openly declares Una to contain such an "evil spirit":

The children have been playing ball together; and Una, heated by the violence with which she plays, sits down on the floor, and complains grievously of warmth—opens her breast. This is the physical manifestation of the evil spirit that struggles for the mastery of her.

Pearl is rumored to be "demon offspring," (SL, 74) -- even Hester questions the evil nature reflected in Pearl's face at times: "it was a face, fiend-like, full of smiling malice...It was as if an evil spirit possessed the child...." (SL, 73).

An action of Una's which distressed Hawthorne was a fixed stare which he could not explain:

Una fixes her eyes on mamma's face, with such steadfastness that mamma beseeches her not to look so directly into her soul. She has often abashed me in the same way--not, however, by the depth of her insight, but because there seems to be a want of delicacy in dwelling upon any one's face so remorselessly;--it seems to embarrass the springs of spiritual life and the movement of the soul.

Hester, too, is the victim of such as stare, particularly when Pearl fixates her attention upon the "A":

Her mother...grew acquainted with a certain look, that warned her when it would be labor thrown away to insist, persuade, or plead. It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning, at such moments, whether Pearl was a human child.

(SL, 69)
Una's troubling lack of emotion ("she has, often, a rhinoceros-armor against sentiment or tenderness; you would think she were marble or adamant")\textsuperscript{62} takes on a magnified dimension in Pearl's adversarial relationship to other children, and even upon occasion, her mother:

Hester would sometimes burst into passionate tears ...Pearl would frown, and clench her little fist, and harden her small features into a stern, unsympathizing look of discontent. Not seldom, she would laugh anew and louder than before, like a thing incapable and unintelligent of human sorrow (SL, 70).

Hawthorne's perception that Una's "natural bent is towards the passionate and the tragic"\textsuperscript{63} set the tone for his profile of Pearl (perhaps even Hester). Yet, Julian Hawthorne -- undeniably the favored of the two children in Hawthorne's Notebooks -- also contributed to the character of Pearl, albeit in a less dramatic fashion. Evert Duykinck attests to the similarities between Pearl and Julian upon meeting the young boy at Melville's house in 1850: "the boy, perhaps four years old, overflowing with life--his ringlets and quick electric ways convinced me that his father had drawn his portrait in the picture of the little girl in that fanciful romance...."\textsuperscript{64}

In the three weeks during the summer of 1851 that Hawthorne and Julian spent alone while Sophia and Una were away, the Notebooks are full of descriptions of Julian as an imaginative, creative child. Julian's love of nature walks, fishing, playing in the sand, and making toys out of natural objects were clearly translated into Pearl's self-entertainment:
At home, within and around her mother's cottage, Pearl wanted not a wide and various circle of acquaintance. The spell of life went forth from her ever creative spirit, and communicated itself to a thousand objects...the unlikeliest materials, a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower, were the puppets of Pearl's witchcraft, and without undergoing any outward change, became spiritually adapted to whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world.

(SL, 71)

However faithful the creation of Pearl Prynne may be to Hawthorne's observations of his own children, there is one critical element which separates her from Una and Julian: Pearl is a complex literary representation of liminality, a "born outcast of the infantile world" (SL, 70):

a creature that had nothing in common with a bygone and buried generation, nor owned herself akin to it. It was as if she had been made afresh, out of new elements, and must perforce be permitted to live her own life, and be a law unto herself, without her eccentricities being reckoned to her for a crime.

(SL, 99)

Pearl is both product and symbol of a sphere separate from the of the Puritan community. She owes her existence to the fact that "a great law had been broken" (SL, 68) and her entire "discoverable principle of being" (SL, 99) is rooted in "the freedom of a broken law" (SL, 99). Pearl constitutes the "scarlet letter embodied" and as such, strikingly illustrates Victor Turner's assertion that liminality is a "metaphor of anti-structure in religious community (DFM, 272).

The action of the Puritan community against Hester and her daughter has the singular effect of placing them in a state of
liminality. The liminal state of being as a rite of passage characteristically begins with ritual metaphors of killing or death marking the separation of the subject from ordinary secular relationships...and concludes with a symbolic rebirth or re incorporation into society as shaped by the law and moral code. The biological order of birth and death is reversed in rites of passage -- there one dies 'to become like a little child.' The intervening liminal phase is thus betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life.

(DFM, 273)

In this respect, one of Hawthorne's first set of images in The Scarlet Letter is that of the prison and the cemetery.

From the opening scene in the novel, Hester and Pearl are clearly demarcated from the Puritan body politic: "mother and daughter stood together in the same circle of seclusion from human society" (SL, 71). The platform of shame upon which Hester and Pearl stand in "ignominy" is the point of departure into this "liminal state." The territorial isolation assigned to these two characters through the stigma of an embroidered material form is characterized by Hawthorne as being one of liberation. Speaking of Hester, he relates that "the tendency of her fact and fortunes has been to set her free: (SL, 143). Pearl's freedom, consequential to "the broken law," is that of "a new and incomprehensible intelligence" (SL, 70) which "lacked reference and adaptation to the world in which she was born" (SL, 68). However existentially free, Hester and Pearl are branded as deviant by the Puritan community: they are consigned to live on the "periphery in terms of how they depart from insiders in the direction of nature or chaos (i.e., violation of the social order)" (DFM, 272).
Whereas Hester's life prior to her crime against the community had been basically one of adherence to the laws of her social structure (and thus, she can be said to have had a "pre-liminal" existence within Puritan society), Pearl is born in "the grey twilight of a dungeon" (SL, 143), the institution which represents the control of elements subversive to the order of the "City Upon a Hill." According to van Gennep, "an individual...that does not have an immediate right, by birth or through specially acquired attributes, to enter a particular house to become established in one of its sections, is in a state of isolation." The conditions of Pearl's birth separate her from Puritan society and place her in isolation, even before she and Hester take up residence "on the outskirts of town...out of the sphere of social activity" (SL, 62). Coupled with Hawthorne's insistence upon her genesis in the wake of a "broken law," Pearl exists totally within the autonomy of the liminal sphere: "the result was a being, whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder; or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered" (SL, 68).

Pearl, as a liminal being, is "betwixt and between" any operable definition of a Puritan child: she is "a law unto herself." Her costuming is a perfect example of the extraordinary, given the surrounding conformity to drabness which is seen in the clothes of other Puritan children. Hester's adornment of Pearl is a virtual extension of the "fantastically embroidered"
The child's attire...was distinguished by a fanciful, or, we might rather say, a fantastic ingenuity, which served, indeed, to heighten the airy charm that early began to develop itself in the little girl, but which appeared to have also a deeper meaning.  
(SL, 63)

Pearl's wardrobe is an extension of her eccentricities as much as her mother's inventiveness:

the dress, so proper was it to little Pearl, seemed an effluence or inevitable development and outward manifestation of her character, no more to be separated from her than the many-hued brilliancy from a butterfly's wing, or the painted glory from the leaf of a bright flower. As with these, so with the child; her garb was all of one idea with her nature.  
(SL, 162)

The relationship between Pearl's costume and her other worldly character is witnessed by Mr. Wilson, the magistrate:

'Prithee, young one, who are thou, and what has ailed thy mother to bedizen thee in this strange fashion?...art thou one of those naughty elfs or fairies?'  
(SL, 81)

In her wardrobe changes, Pearl becomes anything but a Puritan child: "a fairy" (SL, 147), "a mermaid" (SL, 128), or "a nymph-child" (SL, 147).

The liminal state, aside from being free from external constraints, i.e., social norms and taboos, contains within it its own symbols and metaphors of disorder and chaos, an "order peculiar to itself." As a ritual stage, liminality "is a movement between fixed points, and essentially ambiguous, unsettled and unsettling" (DFM, 274), obscuring steady points of
reference established in the non-liminal world as moral and social order. Pearl's behavior is unquestionably "ambiguous, unsettled and unsettling" to the majority of those who come into contact with her. She is contra mundi, a quintessentially radical element, subversive, mercurial, wild, preternatural, undefinable as human even by her own mother. Her behavior arising in her own private world with Hester clashes with the adjoining moral order of Puritan society, and establishes her as an example of "symbolic inversion," defined as "expressive behavior which invests, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms,"\(^\text{66}\) and which carries with it the implicit conditions of disorder and chaos. Such "inverted" behavior is indicative of anti-structure, the freedom of the liminal space unrestrained by law, taboo, or custom.

Pearl's play can be viewed as symbolic drama, and in this portrayal of a form of subversion ("broken law"), Hawthorne prefigures the work of modern behaviorists such as Piaget, Huizinga, and Sutton-Smith. As transformative, mythopoeic, inverted, exemplary of Cassirer's emerging "animal symbolicum"\(^\text{67}\) (man the symbol-maker), child's play is theorized to be the "freeing of focused energies within a restrictive or artificial environment in which social threat can paradoxically be expressed,"\(^\text{68}\) a way in which "abstracting and comprehending cultural crises"\(^\text{69}\) is achieved by the child.

Pearl's behavior in any number of circumstances reveals Hawthorne's recognition of the symbolic significance of child's play:
Pearl's apprehension of her own "cultural crisis" as a persona non grata in the Puritan environment manifests itself in such behaviors as imaginatively transforming "the pine-trees, aged, black, and solemn flinging groans and other melancholy utterances on the breeze" into Puritan elders (SL, 71). In juxtaposition to the Puritan children "playing at going to church, perchance; or at scourging Quakers; or taking scalps in a sham-fight with the Indians, or scaring one another with freaks of imitative witchcraft," (SL, 71), Pearl, in her "inviolable circle" (SL, 70), envisions the "ugliest weeds in the garden" as those same Puritan children, whom she "smote down and uprooted, most unmercifully" (SL, 71).

Turner specifically denotes "an enhanced stress on nature at the expense of culture" (DFM, 252) implicit in the liminal situation. With Pearl, and to a lesser degree with Hester, we see the subjugation of "culture" and the ascendancy of "nature." In Hawthorne's story, the exploration of the "natural," vis-a-vis the physical passion of Hester and Arthur which results in Pearl, and later in the intricate symbolic references to the "forest" and all that it entails for those outside Puritan order, we see again the stage of potentiality. The forest, in particular, is an anti-structure made prominent by its definition in Puritan ideology as an external threat to defined societal order. The liminal signifies a return to origin, primeval wilderness, the unmapped territory. As for the wild Pearl, an observation by Turner regarding this liminal ascendancy of nature over culture is most significant:
Thus it is in liminality and also in those phases of ritual that abut on liminality that one finds profuse symbolic reference to beasts, birds, and vegetation. Animal masks, bird plumage, grass fibers, garments of leaves swathe and enshroud the human neophytes and priests. Thus, symbolically, their structural life is snuffed out by animality and nature, even as it is being regenerated by these very same forces. One dies into nature to be reborn from it. Structural custom, once broken, reveals two human traits. One is liberated intellect, whose liminal product is myth and proto-philosophical speculation, the other is bodily energy, represented by animal disguises and gestures.

(DFM, 253)

There are countless instances with the text to which one's attention is drawn with regard to this passage. The "liberated intellect and proto-philosophical speculation" can be seen in Hester, whose physical isolation allowed for mental speculation far more profound than her contemporaries would have condoned had they known of it. Pearl is repeatedly shown to be aligned with the forces of nature. Hawthorne depicts the potential of her natural power as "prolific of the storm and whirlwind" (SL, 69). In the chapters dealing with Pearl's play in the forest while Hester and Arthur contemplate their fate, Hawthorne describes how "the mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child...And she was gentler here than in the grass-margined streets of the settlement" (SL, 147). The forest, so forbidding to Puritan thought, "became the playmate of the lonely infant" (SL, 146). Its animals -- quail, pigeon, squirrel, fox, and even a wolf (legend has it) -- accept Pearl as a sibling. The forest willingly provides a costume for Pearl:
Pearl gathered the violets, and anemones, and columbines, and some twigs of the freshest green, which the old trees held down before her eyes. With these she decorated her hair, and her young waist, and became a nymph-child, or an infant dryad, or whatever else was in closest sympathy with the antique wood.

(SL, 147)

In an earlier scene along the water side, Pearl had bedecked herself in seaweed, giving herself "the aspect of a little mermaid" (SL, 128).

The portrayal of Pearl as an instinctually wild creature becomes increasingly dramatic throughout the story, especially on the Election Sermon holiday. On that occasion, an intense parallelism is drawn between Pearl and animal behaviors, specifically those of birds: she "flits with a bird-like movement" (SL, 162); erupts into "shouts of a wild, inarticulate, and sometimes piercing music" (162); "flutters like a bird on the point of taking flight" (162). The Spanish pirate finds her "as impossible to touch...as to catch a humming-bird in the air" (SL, 174). Hawthorne juxtaposes her with the subdued gaiety of the Puritans on holiday:

she made the sombre crowd cheerful by her erratic and glistening ray; even as a bird of bright plumage illuminates a whole tree of dusky foliage by darting to and fro, half seen and half concealed, amid the twilight of the clustering leaves.

(SL, 173)

Her motions are characterized by flight: "whenever Pearl saw anything to excite her ever active and wandering curiosity, she flew hitherward" (SL, 173); "she flew into the midst of a group of mariners" (SL, 173). The metaphor is carried to its ultimate conclusion with the remark by Mistress Hibbins that Pearl "art
of the lineage of the Prince of the Air" (SL, 172).

To reinforce Pearl's natural state, Hawthorne has the Indians and seamen react to her wildness as being element to the natural world with which they were most familiar. The Spanish seamen are pirates, and transgress Puritan law opening by smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol in the public square. It is no coincidence that the Indian, when faced with Pearl, "grew conscious of a nature wilder than his own" (SL, 173), and that the seamen "gazed wonderingly and admiringly at Pearl, as if a flake of the sea-foam had taken the shape of a little maid, and were gifted with a soul of the sea-fire, that flashed beneath the prow in the night-time" (SL, 173).

The most compelling feature of the liminal state — aside from its symbolic reversals and inverted play, the infinite variety in costume, speech, and gesture, and the identification with nature over culture — is its emphasis upon the intuitive mode of thought and behavior. In The Ritual Process, Turner refers to historic liminal beings such as "jokers" or "jesters" as possessing great insight into the dynamics of social and political structures around them. As a result, they were often "institutions" in their own right, their disorderly and disruptive behaviors sanctioned by authority.

Hawthorne is aware of the cultural symbolism of disorder in the English tradition through the figure of the Lord of Misrule. Pearl's quixotic behavior as the "elf-child," coupled with her high-profiled and distinctive wardrobe, induces Governor Bellingham
to liken her to "children of the Lord of Misrule" (SL, 81). Originating in the 14th century, the figures of the Lords of Misrule, also known as the Abbots of Unreason, were those of disruptive, pointedly satirical and critical "contraries" whose behavior as fools or pranksters were, more often than not, highly-symbolic reversals of the order and structure of society. Pearl's actions such as splattering the Governor with water (SL, 99) and dancing on gravestones cast her as a contrary. With Governor Bellingham's questioning of "who made thee?", Pearl's answer shows a deliberate attempt at evading authority. She responds that she was "plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison door" (SL, 83) instead of the standard answer of "My Father in Heaven."

In her pointed questioning and fixation upon Hester's "A" and puzzle-like dialogues about the symbol, and in her continual questioning of Dimmesdale's secretive gesture to cover his heart, Pearl's behavior indicates the powerful insights of intuition in the freedom of the liminal stage. From the very beginning of The Scarlet Letter, Pearl shows an absorption with the "A"

The first object of which Pearl seemed aware was ---... the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom!
One day, as her mother stooped over the cradle, the infant's eyes had been caught by the glimmering of the gold embroidery above the letter; and putting up her little hand, she grasped at it smiling, not doubtfully, with with a decided gleam that gave her face the look of a much older child.

(SL, 72; emphasis mine)

Pearl is deliberate in her preoccupation with the letter and with
the mystery that lies behind it. As early as three years old, her questioning of Hester about the significance of the "A" is intrinsically linked with Arthur Dimmesdale, either directly or indirectly. When Hester answers Pearl's earnest query of her origin with "Thy Heavenly Father sent thee," Pearl touches the letter and declares "He did not send me!...I have no Heavenly Father" (SL, 74), and breaks into laughter. This prompts Hester to call her "a strange and elfish child" and reverse the direction of the questioning to Pearl — "Whence didst thou come?" — in the back of her mind remembering the community gossip that "Pearl was a demon offspring" (SL, 74).

At one particular instance of her contrariety, which Hawthorne describes as "one of those moods of perverse merriment which, whenever they occurred, seemed to remove her entirely out of the sphere of sympathy or human contact" (SL, 98), Pearl stops her dancing on a gravestone to "gather prickly burrs" which she "arranged along the lines of the scarlet letter that decorated the maternal bosom" (SL, 99). At that same moment, Dimmesdale, who is a witness to this scene, pronounces Pearl's behavior to be that of "the freedom of a broken law" (SL, 99). Pearl does not let this moment escape without including Dimmesdale in her little "drama":

the child probably overheard their voices; for, looking up to the window, with a bright but naughty smile of mirth and intelligence, she threw one of the prickly burrs at the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. The sensitive clergyman shrunk, with nervous dread, from the light missile. Detecting his emotion, Pearl clapped her little hands in the most extravagant ecstasy.

(SL, 99)
The question of the "A" dominates Chapter XV, "Hester and Pearl," in which Pearl as a form of child's play, has reproduced an "A" of her own out of seaweed:

The child bent her chin upon her breast, and contemplated this device with strange interest; even as if the one only thing for which she had been sent into the world was to make out its hidden import. 'I wonder if Mother will ask me what it means!' thought Pearl.

(SL, 128; emphasis mine)

When Hester questions Pearl about the "A," trying to make the child see that it belongs to her mother alone, Pearl insists that Hester wears the "A" for the same reason that the minister keeps his hand over his heart. Hester, sensing in Pearl "an earnestness that was seldom seen in her wild and capricious character...an unwonted aspect" (SL, 124), pauses in her sudden desire to tell Pearl the truth, but capitulates, even realizing that withholding the truth from the perceptive Pearl is "the price of the child's sympathy" (SL, 130). Pearl's "earnestness" fades as a result of Hester's evasion, and her repetition of the questions "Mother, what does the scarlet letter mean?...Mother! Mother! -- why does the minister keep his hand over his heart?" (SL, 131) is satiric and mocking.

Pearl's mockery of Hester and Dimmesdale is an ironic one, as if she knows that their denial of answers (Hester) or denial of recognition (Dimmesdale) is a covering device for a vulnerability which, in fact, is mirrored in one of Dimmesdale's dreams:

And now, through the chamber which these spectral
thoughts had made so ghastly, glided Hester Prynne, leading along little Pearl, in her scarlet garb and pointing her forefinger first at the scarlet letter...and then at the clergyman's own breast.

(SL, 107)

Pearl's "pointing" to the hidden secret of Hester and Arthur -- whether in her questioning of her origins, the meaning of the "A", or in Dimmesdale's secretive gesture -- is her intentional response to their attempts to cover up the reality of her existence. Her refusal to accept evasive answers indicates her own intuitive perception of the situation. Unfettered by laws, rules, or social norms, Pearl's behavior as a child of Misrule -- willfully contrary, satirical, ironic, and mocking -- is directly marked at the truth.

In creating Pearl a "liminal" figure Hawthorne fashions her symbolic behavior and her human actions as "in betwixt and between" the normal spheres of human relations, yet he is aware that Pearl cannot remain in such a state forever. A brief notation in his journal attests to both the appeal of the "neutral territory" and its dangers:

The Scottish superstition, that Fairies sometimes steal children might be turned into an allegory; a child's giving himself up to fancy, and dwelling in a sort of Fairy Land, till he becomes unfit for realities.

The one element needed to free Pearl from the dangers of becoming "unfit for realities" on a permanent basis -- the perpetual liminal state -- is that of "sympathy," which for Hawthorne represents "a moral and psychological state of grace," Sympathy, "as an affective principle, worked against oppositions
and denials...it would challenge all estrangements." In essence, sympathy would reunite the alienated individual with their own humanity, and by extension, with humanity at large. In Hawthorne's use of sympathy as a necessary quality for human life, the question of Pearl's resolution as a character can be examined. In 1840, Hawthorne wrote to Sophia that

Indeed, we are but shadows -- we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream -- till the heart is touched. That touch creates us -- then we begin to be -- thereby, we are beings of reality and inheritors of eternity.

From the moment of her birth, Pearl Prynne had stood in the "shadows" in terms of the legitimacy of her being and existence in human culture. As has been noted, Pearl's predominant "sympathy" was with the world of nature, the forest which had accepted her as one of its own creatures. Hester's cognizance of Pearl's tendency to exist "entirely out of the sphere of sympathy or human contact" (SL, 98) troubles her, and in her aspirations for Pearl, her primary wish was that

she wanted -- what some people want throughout life -- a grief that should deeply touch her [Pearl] and thus humanize and make her capable of sympathy. (SL, 133)

This is precisely what is achieved in the novel's climactic scene: Arthur Dimmesdale's recognition of Pearl as his child shortly before his death.

Pearl's relationship with Dimmesdale throughout the novel alternates between a mockery of his vulnerability to the circumstances of his heart (the "A") and a longing for his
recognition of her in public. Pearl's earliest hint of sympathetic feelings for Dimmesdale occur after he has defended Hester's right to custody of her daughter in the face of the political authority's attempt to separate them:

Pearl, that wild and flighty little elf, stole softly towards him, and taking his hand in the grasp of both her own, laid her cheek against it; a caress so tender, and withal so unobtrusive that her mother who was looking on, asked herself, —'Is that my little Pearl?'

(SL, 86)

In Chapter XV, "The Minister's Vigil," Arthur summons Hester and Pearl up to the scaffold where he has assumed some sort of secret nocturnal penance for his guilt:

The minister felt for the child's hand and took it. The moment he did so, there came what seemed a tumultuous rush of new life, other life than his own, pouring like a torrent into his heart, and hurrying throughout all his veins, as if the mother and child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system. The three formed an electric chain.

(SL, 111)

However, Pearl is not content. She asks Dimmesdale to promise to "stand with mother and me, tomorrow noon-tide" (SL, 112), a demand which Arthur tries to evade by saying that he will "one other day...another time...at the great judgement day...the daylight of this world shall not see out meeting" (SL, 112). Pearl's sense of her rejection produces, again, her contrary self. She laughs, and pulls her hand away, mocking Dimmesdale when he asks her who Chillingworth is. She defends her mockery: "Thou wast not bold! -- Thou wast not true!...Thou wouldst not promise to take my hand and mother's hand, tomorrow noon-tide!" (SL, 114).
In spite of Hester's assurance to Pearl in the forest that Dimmesdale will acknowledge her "in days to come" (SL, 151), Pearl "would show no favor to him" (SL, 151). Upon receiving a kiss on the forehead from Dimmesdale, "hoping that a kiss might prove a talisman to admit him into the child's kindlier regards" (151), Pearl immediately runs to the brook, washing her face "until the unwelcomed kiss was quite washed off" (SL, 152).

The contradiction between the scaffold and forest scenes where Dimmesdale acknowledges his relationship to the two exiles, and his "remoteness and intangibility" on the fateful day of the Election Sermon is apparent to Pearl, whose eccentric behavior is at its peak on that day — the day that will witness Dimmesdale's acceptance and public declaration of his paternity of Pearl. His death is the climax of Pearl's tenure in a liminal world:

Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled.

(SL, 181)

Dimmesdale has finally given in to the truth, and in doing so, satisfies Pearl's longing for communitas, "the desire for a total unmediated relationship between person and person liberating them from conformity to general norms" (DFM, 271). The emotional impact of his acceptance and death brings Pearl's latent humanity to the forefront of her consciousness, where it will remain.

Pearl, the "elf-child," the "half-fledged angel of judgment" (SL,
76), the creature on the periphery of humanity, is no more. The chaos and disorder of the "A" will no longer rule the world of Pearl.

After Pearl has been humanized by her father's death, Hawthorne's account of her is brief, but as with his understated descriptions in the "Custom-House," highly pertinent to his overall scheme. We are told, under the guise of speculation, that Pearl and Hester leave for Europe, where Pearl marries into gentility, has her own family, becomes a dutiful and loving daughter, and even inherits Chillingworth's substantial holdings in the New World. Pearl has crossed the threshold from liminality to societal structure and convention. In Turner's terms,

the immediacy of communitas gives way to the mediacy of structure...in rites de passage men are released from structure into communitas, only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of communitas.

Pearl is the only character to emerge from The Scarlet Letter with any expectations of a "normal" life in human community. Chillingworth and Dimmesdale die; Hester returns to New England to assume her isolation, which is by now largely self-imposed. Pearl is an affirmation of the positive and regenerative aspects of rites of passage, rites which are ongoing:

For groups, as well as for individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. And there are always new thresholds to cross: the thresholds of summer and winter, of a season or a year, of a month or a night; the thresholds of birth, adolescence, maturity, and old age.
There is a troubling aspect to the resolution of Pearl as a character: she does not stay in America, but goes abroad to begin her new life. In the demise of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, and the lingering tragedy of the "A" for Hester, Hawthorne's "power of blackness," as Melville called it, is painfully apparent. In Pearl's exodus, Hawthorne's vision continues to reflect upon the New World as a place untenable for a regenerated or potential society free from alienation or conflict — as a world darkened by Puritan judgment. Indeed, even in the initial scaffold scene, Hawthorne describes the Puritan adulteress, Hester Prynne, as an "image of Divine Maternity" (SL, 45), a Madonna, and intimates the tragic hopelessness of the situation: "the world was only the darker for this woman's beauty, and the more lost for the infant that she had borne" (SL, 45).

Unlike Pearl, Hawthorne did not seem able to cross his own threshold. In dealing with the "blackness" in Hawthorne, we can see that it was not in the exposure of "negative" societal agents such as disorder, contradiction, and alienation that his writings are significant — such a "creative darkness" (DFM, 51) is implicit in liminality — but that he chose to view them as generic traits of existence, from which there seemed to be no escape: as if his mind were "doomed to chasing its own shadow in a chaos."  

Surely Hawthorne would have identified with Alexis de Tocqueville's version of the American protagonist:

I need not traverse earth and sky to discover a wondrous object woven of contrasts, of infinite greatness and littleness, of intense gloom and amazing brightness, capable at once of
exciting pity, admiration, terror, contempt,
I have only to look at myself. Man springs
out of nothing, crosses time, and disappears
forever in the bosom of God; he is seen but
for a moment, wandering on the verge of the
two abysses, and there he is lost.

In utilizing the "neutral territory" for his fiction,
Hawthorne's imagination had been freed from "truth" and "reality"
in order to pursue the moral dilemmas of humanity in relation
to society, and presumably, the possibilities and difficulties
in resolving those conflicts. In this, his romance expresses
the dominant purpose of the liminal world: to provide for "the
analysis of culture into factors and their free recombination in
any and every possible pattern" (DFM, 255); indeed, outstanding
liminal situations are those "occasions on which society takes
cognizance of itself" (DFM, 240). The importance of assessing
Hawthorne from the standpoint of liminality is that it can provide
for the totality of the romance and its characters such as Pearl
Prynne in a valid and significant connection with the culture
at large: Pearl is not to be dismissed, nor is the romance, for
the reflection of a world where there are no sure answers, no
definite structures, no monolithic value systems. Turner's claim
for the importance of "antistructural liminality" is a fitting
conclusion to this discussion:

The antistructural liminality provided in the cores
of ritual and aesthetic forms represents the
reflexivity of the social process, wherein society
becomes at once subject and direct object; it
represents also its subjunctive mood, where
suppositions, desires, hypotheses, possibilities,
and so forth, all become legitimate. We have been
too prone to think, in static terms, that
cultural superstructures are passive mirrors, mere reflections of substructural productive modes and relations or of the political processes that enforce the dominance of the productively privileged. If we were as dialectical as we claim to be, we would see that it is more a matter of an existential bending back upon ourselves: the same plural subject is the active superstructure that assesses the substructural and structural modalities that we also are. Our concreteness, our substantiality is with us in our reflexivity, even in the ludic play domain of our liminal moments: play is more serious than we, the inheritors of Western Puritanism, have thought.
Notes


4 Ibid.


6 Ibid., p. 312.

7 Nathaniel Hawthorne to J. T. Fields, ibid., p. 307.


11 Ibid., p. 113.
Notes to pages 12 - 25

12 Ibid., p. 111.

13 Ibid.


15 Ibid.

16 Lewis, p. 5.

17 Ibid., p. 115.


19 Lionel Trilling, in Kaplan, p. 38.


21 Trilling, in Kaplan, p. 38.


23 Lewis, p. 114.


Notes to pages 26-37


30 Ibid., p. vii.

31 Ibid., p. 10.

32 Ibid., p. vii.

33 Turner, Ritual Process, p.128.

34 Ibid.

35 Stubbs, p. 5.


37 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Haunted Mind," in Twice-Told Tales (1851), ed. Roy Harvey Pearce, Centenary edition (Columbus:
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38 Eric Mottram, "Power and Law in Hawthorne's Fictions,


39 Tzvetan Todorov, ibid., p. 195.

40 van Gennep, p. iii.

41 Ibid., p. 191.

42 Ibid., p. 21.

43 Ibid., p. 18.


47 Ibid., p. 690.

48 Ibid.


51 Garlitz, p. 692.

52 Ibid., p. 693.

53 Ibid., p. 699.


56 Ibid., p. 29.


58 Ibid., p. 413.

59 Ibid., pp. 430-431.

60 Ibid., pp. 420-421.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., p. 415.

63 Ibid., p. 410.


68 Babcock, p. 25.

69 Ibid.


72 Kaplan, p. 3.

73 Ibid., p. 44.


76 van Gennep, p. 189.


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VITA

Tonia Lanette Horton

Born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, June 17, 1954.
Graduated from Menchville High School, Newport News, Virginia,
June, 1972, B.A. Arizona State University.

After a circuitous route through the History of Religions,
American Indian Education, and American Art History, not to mention
the trail of worn novels between Mexico and England, the author
entered the M.A. program in American Studies in 1984. Upon her
graduation from William and Mary, she will leave the liminal world
of academe for the Smithsonian Institution in search of the Real Job.