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Nineteenth century fictional children: how typical is Pearl?

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Nineteenth century fictional children:

How typical is Pearl?

by

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INTRODUCTION

The sentimental novel was highly successful in America at the time Hawthorne was preparing The Scarlet Letter for publication. Five years later, after Hawthorne had gained recognition as an author, the continuing supremacy of sentimentality provoked him; his irritation appeared in a letter to Ticknor, his publisher. "America is now wholly given over to a d--d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash-- and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of the 'Lamplighter,' and other books neither better nor worse?---Worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the 100,000. . . ." ¹ A comparison of the sales of Hawthorne's novel to The Lamplighter's sales illustrates why Hawthorne was concerned about his economic success. The Scarlet Letter sold 6000 copies in two years--Hawthorne's royalties totaling \$450.00. ² The Lamplighter, however, sold 40,000 copies within eight weeks. ³

Fortunately, Hawthorne did not attempt to achieve the success of the sentimental novel by following its pattern. The Scarlet Letter is true to his artistic imagination, not a variation of a type which dictates both plot and characterization. Consequently, Pearl is not the sentimental child-heroine, who is "sweeter, purer, prettier, frailer, and much

holier than anyone else,"⁴ as stated by Alice Crozier. She is a living, breathing, naughty child among what Herbert Ross Brown calls "paragons of pygmy size."⁵

Among the most pure of these virtuous children are Little Eva of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin and Nell of Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop. Gerty of The Lamplighter also is exemplary, although she possesses a violent temper, one bad trait which a sentimental heroine is allowed, provided she can learn to control it early in life. By comparing and contrasting Pearl with Nell, Eva, and Gerty, I will attempt to show that Pearl does not fit the stereotype of the sentimental child-heroine, and, further, that she is a realistic portrait of a child, affected by and reacting to her environment.

I have chosen to examine Eva and Nell because of their exceptional goodness, the first found in the most popular novel of the nineteenth century, the other created by the most popular English writer of all times, a claim made by G. K. Chesterton.⁶ Another reason I chose The Old Curiosity Shop is its effect on the development of the sentimental novel in America; Little Eva and many others were directly influenced by the character of Nell. Eva and Nell possess the characteristics of the sentimental child-heroine who, according to Herbert Ross Brown, often dies as a result of her intense desire to be perfect.⁷ Virtue rewarded with riches and love, however, was more popular in sentimental literature than the death of the heroine. Gerty is the most typical heroine who

is amply rewarded for her goodness; therefore, The Lamplighter by Maria Cummins is my third choice.

Eva, Nell, and Gerty are all variations of the stereotyped sentimental child-heroine and have a number of traits in common. Beauty, sensibility, self-sacrifice and suffering, virtuous simplicity, and maturity are the attributes I have chosen to examine in the characters of Pearl and the three sentimental children. The results will illustrate Pearl's differences from Eva, Nell, and Gerty. The study also will attempt to show that Pearl is basically a realistically pictured child, contrary to what many critics believe. (I have depended primarily on Herbert Ross Brown's The Sentimental Novel in America 1789-1860 and E. Douglas Branch's The Sentimental Years 1836-1860 for my information about the sentimental child and her characteristics.)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A major criticism of The Scarlet Letter is the characterization of Pearl. Critics have seen her varying from the "beneficent conscience of Hester"⁸ to Hawthorne's "id personified."⁹ She appears as "perhaps the most modern child in all literature"¹⁰ and as a "gem of purest water."¹¹ A reason for the wide variety of opinion is the complexity of Pearl's character, according to Barbara Garlitz. She believes that most critics "have isolated only one thing Hawthorne says about Pearl or taken only one aspect of her personality for the whole."¹² Critics forget the complexity of the character while emphasizing only one phase of it, a view with which Marjorie Elder agrees.¹³ This may be an explanation for the divergence of opinion about Pearl.

One of the most frequent views is that Pearl as symbol is too mechanical to be a believable human being. On this point F. O. Matthiessen is the most emphatic critic. Pearl "is worth dissecting as the purest type of Spenserian characterization, which starts with abstract qualities and hunts for their proper embodiment."¹⁴ Pearl as symbol means several things to different critics. Barbara Garlitz sees her as a symbol of her mother's diseased moral state, not as an embodiment of the scarlet letter as George Loring and Richard Harter Fogle see her.¹⁵ Roy Male agrees that Pearl is a token of the sin committed by Hester, but Pearl, in addition, is a

promise of redemption held out to the sinful woman.¹⁶ F. J. Masback concurs with the view of Pearl as a regenerative symbol, the source of both retribution and redemption.¹⁷ Arlin Turner and Thomas Bradfield agree that Pearl is an agent of fate, of importance to effect Dimmesdale's redemption.¹⁸

Some critics, however, feel that Pearl as a symbol is no more unreal than Pearl as a Romantic Child of Nature. Chester Eisinger's belief--that Pearl, the child of nature, illustrates uncivilized nature outside the realm of grace--clashes with the Romantic view.¹⁹ However, Darrel Abel's view that Pearl is "one who discovers conscious and valuable affinities with the natural world and enjoys an active and formative relationship with that world"²⁰ has the support of many critics. Mark Van Doren believes that Pearl is innocent, like many of Hawthorne's early fictional children, shown in her kinship with nature.²¹ Darrel Abel, without alluding to Hawthorne's earlier creations, claims that Hawthorne considers childhood as a pre-moral condition, identified as the unmorality of childhood by Walter Blair.²² Julian Hawthorne ascribes the pre-moral condition to a lack of experience.²³ Harry Levin agrees that although Pearl does not yet understand Adam's fall, nevertheless, "her innocence does not exempt her from the inherited evils of the flesh. . . ." ²⁴ Hawthorne's exaggeration of a child's incapacity for moral action is one of the reasons Hyatt Waggoner sees Pearl's characterization almost as an abstraction throughout the novel.²⁵

The emphasis on Pearl as an innocent child and as a symbol allows few critics to see her lifelike traits. Many others feel, however, that her character is both symbolic and realistic, although the first overshadows the second. W. B. Stein, who discusses Pearl in her Faustian complex, states that she can be seen as a demonic child only by readers who still believe in fairy tales.²⁶ Barbara Garlitz believes that Hawthorne is describing Pearl in the then current physiological manner and that she is a realistically observed child in detail.²⁷ Although considering Pearl the least real of The Scarlet Letter's characters, Raymond Short sees Pearl as realistic psychologically as well.²⁸ Richard Harter Fogle grants that Pearl is lifelike, "given the central improbability of her undeviating purposiveness."²⁹ F. J. Masback asserts that the purposiveness Fogle finds improbable is Pearl's very predictable reaction to Hester's own emphasis upon the scarlet letter.³⁰

Even though some critics argue for Pearl's reality, others see her as a distortion of childhood. Stanley Williams recognizes Hawthorne's daughter Una in the character of Pearl but thinks she still is tedious and occasionally preposterous.³¹ Leslie Fiedler is more emphatic in his criticism. "Taken as a character constructed in psychological depth, Pearl is intolerable. . . . based on painstaking observation of a real little girl . . . she is so distorted in the interests of her symbolic role that she seems by turns incredible

and absurd."³² Matthiessen says he can understand the reader's desire to murder Pearl, she is so tedious.³³ The reason for this tediousness, Mark Van Doren believes, can be found in the author. When Pearl's behavior is meaningless, "Hawthorne may be supposed not to have absorbed well enough the notes he made about Una when she was a child of five."³⁴ Even though Edward Wagenknecht insists on seeing Pearl as a bastardization of Una,³⁵ I believe she reflects Hawthorne's observations of Una quite accurately. I hope to show that although Pearl is not a completely credible character, a careful reading of the novel shows that she is much more like a normal child than the critics would lead one to expect.

DISCUSSION

Appearance

Pearl possesses few traits in common with the sentimental child-heroine, but her appearance is one way in which she and they are alike. Herbert Ross Brown quotes Strephon, a character in Ebenezer Bradford's novel, The Art of Courting, who compiled a list of characteristics he would like to see a sentimental heroine possess. "I should wish she might be above the common size of woman, well proportioned in body and limbs; her skin white and ruddy; her eyes black and sparkling; her hair brown and flowing, and her features well proportioned one with the other."³⁶ As the fashion plates of the nineteenth century illustrate, children were physically regarded as miniature adults. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover small models of the ideal heroine throughout the sentimental novels.

Of the four children being studied, Gerty of The Lamp-lighter best fills Strephon's qualifications. Even as an underprivileged child, she has great black eyes, which retain their luster throughout her childhood. At the age of fourteen Gerty is tall with a slender figure and a delicate frame. Her complexion is dark but clear, highlighted by the rosy color which often flushes her cheeks. Her hair, which was cut short during her illness, has grown in length and quality until she is crowned with dark silken braids. Her large mouth is

redeemed by two rows of perfect pearly teeth. Gerty possesses the eyes, the hair, the complexion, and the frame of the typical sentimental heroine.

Unlike Gerty--who exhibits a minor flaw, her imperfectly formed mouth--Pearl possesses perfect physical beauty. Her dark, glossy brown hair complements her bright complexion and sparkling black eyes. A perfect shape and native grace are part of her rich, faultless beauty. A sentimental heroine requires no more beautiful exterior than the one Pearl possesses.

Both Eva in Uncle Tom's Cabin and Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop are, like Pearl, perfect in their beauty, but possess a more supernatural type of beauty, suggesting they are too good for this world. Eva is the perfect form of childish beauty; she has large, deep, serious blue eyes and a nobly-shaped neck and bust. Her long golden-brown hair floats about her shoulders like a cloud, indicating her other-worldly beauty. Nell's very small and delicate frame implies that perhaps she, too, is destined for another world. Her bright blue eyes, light brown hair, beauty and grace complete the picture.

Sensibility

Although a heroine's physical attractiveness is very important, her sensibility is a much more valuable trait. Herbert Ross Brown points out that the possession of sensibility adequately compensated for a lack of regular

features.³⁷ Naturalness of feeling--spontaneous, unreasoned, intuitive--is the most desirable attribute a sentimental heroine can possess, ranking far above intelligence or an ability to reason. Her sensibility can best be seen in her eyes, often brimming with tears.

Nell probably possesses the most sensibility of the four girls. Her eyes often fill with tears because of her extreme feeling, although she keeps the proper balance between reason and emotion. Nell sits by the deathbed of a small boy and weeps; she is almost broken-hearted over the boy's death and thinks of her grandfather who will be alone after she, too, dies. When her grandfather acknowledges that she has suffered as a result of his inability to provide for her, Nell is surprised that he considers her life hard. She begins to hurry away but changes her mind, returning to embrace him before she rushes to her room to cry. Later her grandfather attempts to kneel to beg her forgiveness for what has passed. She prevents his action and asks, "Oh, grandfather, what should I forgive?"³⁸ Even after her desolate childhood, she is completely honest in her belief that she has nothing to complain of.

Like Nell's, Eva's sensibility is readily apparent. The spiritual gravity of her eyes reveals her sensitivity to others' suffering. As she moves about the riverboat, people notice her less for her perfect beauty than for a "singular and dreamy earnestness of expression"³⁹ which the idealistic

person recognizes for what it is and which the dullest also notices and wonders at. Eva is especially sensitive to the troubles of others and responds feelingly. Her mother continually complains about her own unhappiness, but Eva is still moved to walk gravely around to her mother's chair and put her arms around her mother's neck out of sympathy for her problem.

Gerty possesses sensibility in abundance, but perhaps not quite as much as Nell or Eva. She also sympathizes with others' problems. Miss Emily Graham, a young lady who becomes her guardian, explains what a sadness her blindness causes her. Gerty, quite characteristically, bursts into tears. A truly sentimental person, Gerty relies on her intuition to dictate her actions. When she first meets Emily, Gerty clings to her in affection and sympathy, not showing the usual awe or constraint with which one of the lower class would be expected to treat a lady. Even politeness, which Gerty possesses in abundance, is learned by cultivating one's heart. In order to see a sentimental heroine's true beauty, one must see her when her feelings are touched, tears appear in her eyes, and her whole soul shines out through them.

Pearl's beauty, unlike the sentimental heroine's beauty, is more often destroyed than enhanced by her nature shining out of her eyes. The Puritans see witchcraft in her eyes and her naughty smile, not a certain earnestness which everyone notices in Eva. Pearl does have love in her heart, but her mood dictates whether or not she'll show it. At one time she

tenderly lays Dimmesdale's hand against her cheek; at another time she refuses to approach him. When he kisses her, she immediately washes off the kiss. She shows her tenderness to her mother and kisses her on the forehead and cheeks, then devilishly also kisses the scarlet letter. Such unruly, changeable behavior certainly does not show the sensibility, the spontaneous overflow of feeling, of the sentimental heroine.

Self-sacrifice and suffering

"The more exquisite the sensibility" the heroine possessed, "the greater the suffering," according to Herbert Ross Brown.⁴⁰ When an adult heroine's feelings were very strong, her emotional suffering often manifested itself in a swoon. However, sentimentality was not the only cause of suffering. The child-heroine suffers greatly because of her superior virtue. The humanitarian impulse, especially kindness to animals and servants, shows her sensitivity to the suffering of others, which she often sees when others do not. As a result of her concern for others, the child-heroine is busy with adult chores instead of indulging in childish play. Especially important to the heart of the heroine is the reform of individuals and society. Her sensitiveness and goodness make her extremely aware of evil; because she loves everyone and everything, she sets out to right the wrongs which she finds.

The characteristics of kindness to animals and slaves, as

well as concern for one's own family, are combined to perfection in the characters of Eva and Nell. Eva illustrates a continual concern with the slaves' happiness rather than with her own. She grieves over the condition of slaves in chains when she sees them on the riverboat. Her sympathies are aroused to action and she brings them candy, nuts, and oranges to make their bondage a little lighter. She also is very kind to her own slaves. She brings them prizes from her trip up the Mississippi and gives her gold vinaigrette to her colored mammy, who has a headache. Her generosity reaches its peak with Topsy, however. Eva's aunt has caught Topsy stealing and Eva remonstrates, "Poor Topsy, why need you steal? You're going to be taken good care of, now. I'm sure I'd rather give you anything of mine, than have you steal it."⁴¹ Eva's humanitarianism goes so far as to teach the slaves to read. She willingly will sell her diamond necklace to purchase a place in the free states for their slaves; her feeling for humanity of any color promotes an attempt to reform the system of slavery.

Eva spends her time caring for slaves; Nell dedicates her life to her grandfather's happiness and well-being. When he becomes ill, she sits beside his pillow day and night, anticipating his every need. Later, when they are wandering, she selects the best fragments of food for him. Still farther along their journey, she is too tired to eat, but she sits up with her grandfather until he falls asleep. Her love and

concern for her grandfather cause her attempt to reform her brother Fred. "But I love you dearly, Fred. . . . but oh! if you would leave off vexing him [their grandfather] and making him unhappy, then I could love you more."⁴²

Nell isn't too busy caring for her grandfather to be concerned also for the animals she encounters during their travels. At an inn she meets the proprietor of a dog act. During dinner Nell attempts to feed the dogs before she eats, hungry though she is, but the owner of the dogs prevents her.

Part of her concern for others appears in her occupation with household chores rather than in games children usually play. She keeps house for her grandfather and resents anyone else doing for him that which she can do. The moment she returns home at the beginning of the novel, she begins to prepare supper. Later she brings some needlework to the table to sew while she sits beside her grandfather. After she and her grandfather have decided to run away, she prepares for the trip while he sleeps. In their wanderings they come upon a Punch and Judy show, and Nell immediately volunteers to mend Judy's clothing. Her work continues until she is too weak to do anything any longer. Then she hates to be a burden to anyone else and often does not complain in order to avoid troubling someone else.

Nell's industry and desire to be helpful are dominant traits in Gerty's character, also. As a child, Gerty is sad because she has never had the opportunity to help anyone.

The day she discovers housework is one of the happiest she has known; it is "the first in which she had known that happiness--perhaps the highest earth affords--of feeling that she had been instrumental in giving joy to another."⁴³ After that she works about the house, doing as much as her age will allow. Later, when she is living with Emily, she continues helping with the housework. She does not hesitate to hull strawberries because, as she prosaically points out, her hands are washable. When the servants are neglecting Emily, Gerty irons Emily's clothing herself, without Emily's knowledge, of course. The element of self-sacrifice makes the chore an act of love.

Gerty's concern for her fellow men causes her to sacrifice herself for their welfare. Her care of Trueman Flint, the man who saved her from freezing to death when she had been cast out, is prompted by a love which has resulted from gratitude. After he has suffered a stroke, she takes walks with him, always leaving him the easier path. Her pale and anxious looks and lack of concern for the opinion of the world illustrate her care only for his welfare. After Trueman's death, Emily, who is Gerty's second guardian, becomes ill, and Gerty nurses her, also out of a love rooted in gratitude. "All day long no troublesome fly was ever permitted to approach her [Emily's] pillow, her aching head was relieved by hours of patient bathing and the little feet that were never weary were always noiseless."⁴⁴ As careful as she is for the ones she

loves, Gerty does not limit her ministrations to the people who have done something for her. She discovers that Nan Grant, the wicked woman who put her out in the cold night, is dying, and Gerty, forgiving all, cares for her until her death. Gerty also nurses her childhood sweetheart's mother and grandfather because he is away and unable to care for them.

One can easily see that Eva, Nell, and Gerty are much too busy doing good deeds to have time to indulge in childish games. Not so for Pearl. When she is at the seashore, she gathers seaweed and makes herself clothing from it. In dressing up like her mother, she dons a seaweed "A" because it is like her mother's and it is also the capital "A" she has learned to recognize in the Horn Book. She makes little boats out of birch bark, loads them with shells, and sets them out on their journey. She sees her reflection in a pool and plays with it for a while. She makes a game of throwing flowers at the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom.

Pearl, unlike the sentimental child-heroine, is inconsistently sympathetic with the suffering of others. When her mother cries, Pearl may frown, clench her fist and look unsympathetic, continue in her naughtiness, or sob out her love to her mother. She hates the little Puritans because they scorn her and her mother. If the children gather about her, Pearl becomes very angry, picks up stones and hurls them, shouting at the children with all her might. Her feeling for animals is as inadequate as her sympathy for humans. "She seized a

live horseshoe by the tail, and made a prize of several five-fingers, and laid out a jelly-fish to melt in the warm sun. . . . Perceiving a flock of beach birds, that fed and fluttered along the shore, the naughty child picked up her apron full of pebbles, and, creeping from rock to rock after these small sea-fowl, displayed remarkable dexterity in pelt-ing them."⁴⁵ However, she isn't all bad. She sees a little gray bird which she believes she has hit with a pebble. Its broken wing makes her sorry for it, and she quits her play. However, unlike the sentimental child-heroine's actions, the reader cannot predict Pearl's actions in any given situation.

The sentimental child-heroine's sensibility causes her to sympathize with others; her love of goodness causes her to attempt to right the wrongs she finds in the world. She tries to make other people as good as she is. Eva most consciously sets out to change the people with whom she associates. Getting everyone to love everyone else and to be kinder to others is important to her. She attempts to teach her mother to love someone other than herself, to teach her father to love her mother, and to teach her aunt to love the slaves. She also tries to save the souls of her father and the slaves. On her deathbed she begins to remind the slaves that they must pray and read the Bible, but she recalls that they cannot read. "Never mind . . . I have prayed for you; and I know Jesus will help you, even if you can't read. Try to do the best you can; pray every day; ask Him to help you, and get the Bible read to

you whenever you can; and I think I shall see you all in heaven."⁴⁶ St. Clare's exclamation, "O, Evangeline! rightly named . . . hath not God made thee an evangel to me?"⁴⁷ could have been the sentiment of anyone she has met.

The nineteenth century confidence in the woman as reformer inspired many children to become teachers as well as missionaries. Gerty becomes a teacher of such skill, she hardly dares tell Emily her employer's opinion of her ability to teach because she's afraid it will sound like boasting. She not only teaches school but also teaches her father that it is better to trust all men rather than none. Like Gerty, Nell also teaches--every week she gives Kit, her grandfather's errand boy, writing lessons. Even though the lessons are occasions of great hilarity, "a gentle wish on her part to teach"⁴⁸ is ever present. Nell's desire to redeem her grandfather from his gambling fever is much more important than teaching Kit, however. She tries to coax her grandfather to stop playing but cannot convince him. When his weakness tempts him to steal, she runs away with him to save him from temptation, even though she is not well.

As Gerty and Eva try to save their fathers and Nell her grandfather, Pearl attempts to redeem Dimmesdale, according to Anne Marie McNamara.⁴⁹ However, I agree with Edward Sampson that Dimmesdale's repentance is sufficiently motivated without Pearl's actions.⁵⁰ If Pearl is trying consciously to save Reverend Dimmesdale's soul, her methods are

questionable. "With a bright but naughty smile of mirth and intelligence, she threw one of the prickly burrs at the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale."⁵¹ When she sees that he shrinks from the burr, she is delighted and claps her hands. One must agree her methods of reform vary greatly from Eva's.

Hawthorne states that Pearl--unlike Eva in her sadness concerning the evils of slavery--has none of the sadness over preceding generations' sins, which is almost necessary to a reformer. "She had not the disease of sadness, which almost all children . . . inherit . . . from the troubles of their ancestors."⁵² In this respect she may be unlike the normal Puritan child, but one must remember that her environment is considerably different from the normal. Hester is too concerned with her own sin to preach the doctrine of moral depravity to Pearl.

Virtuous simplicity

As the Puritans would never have agreed with the nineteenth century belief in the importance of sensibility, neither would they have agreed with the philosophy of natural virtue and virtuous simplicity nor with the logical corollary that the child was more natural, simple, and virtuous than the adult.⁵³ The Christian virtues of "resignation, long-suffering, loving kindness, all-embracing faith and charity"⁵⁴ were all a part of the sentimental heroine's nature. It is no wonder her child counterpart was very close to perfection.

Eva and Nell are closer to sinlessness than the other two children being studied. Eva seems to be doing a private penance because of the evils of slavery. When she hears about the horrible life of Prue, a drunken Negress in the community, she turns pale and sighs heavily, "These things sink into my heart."⁵⁵ She is more aware of the evils of slavery because she is better than the adults who surround her. On the riverboat, she walks mournfully around the section of the boat where the slaves are chained. "She would glide in among them, and look at them with an air of perplexed and sorrowful earnestness; and sometimes she would lift their chains with her slender hands, and then sigh wofully, as she glided away."⁵⁶ No wonder Eva's father sees her as much better than an ordinary child.

Nell's grandfather asserts that she is a young sinless child, much as St. Clare sees Eva as an angel. Nell instinctively recognizes the evil in the villainous man who pursues her and her grandfather, just as she is able to see the good in his virtuous wife when she first meets the older woman. She willingly goes with her grandfather when he insists on traveling farther, even though her feet are tired and blistered. Frank Donovan correctly states, "No one ever knew a living girl who was so thoroughly good . . . symbolic of purity, virtue, innocence, self-sacrifice, and all of the highest ideals of angelic womanhood."⁵⁷

The traits of loving kindness, resignation, and self-

sacrifice are also apparent in Gerty's life. Even as a child of the slums, Gerty possesses "fountains of warm affection yet unstirred, a depth of tenderness never yet called out, and a warmth and devotion of nature that wanted only an object to expend themselves upon."⁵⁸ Trueman is the recipient of much of Gerty's warm affection and devotion and is continually astonished at her simplicity, demonstrated throughout her life. She also is very concerned about others. While she is ill, she often lies awake all night, suffering, without making any noise so she doesn't waken True. Later in life she shows this selflessness when she saves the life of the girl who supposedly is engaged to the man she loves. To aid someone at one's own expense is the height of selflessness but very common among heroines of the sentimental novel.

Pearl, unlike Gerty, is not selfless, patient, or long-suffering. She early recognizes the hostility she and her mother face in the world and returns it. She indulges her own whims, rather than being considerate of the feelings of others. When she and Hester are walking to the governor's mansion, she scampers ahead and capers about, but, like many young children, demands to be carried at times. When she visits a graveyard with her mother, she skips from one grave to another until she finds a flat tombstone to dance on. Hawthorne is not picturing sacrilege, merely a normal, thoughtless child doing something that would be beyond the comprehension of the other three.

Maturity

In addition to being morally superior to adults, the child-heroine is often wise beyond her years. This maturity manifests itself in various ways--in self-control, prudence, insight, and abilities beyond the normal range of childhood.

Both Eva and Gerty can read exceptionally well. At the age of nine Gerty reads with understanding and an excellent accent; in fact she is so accomplished that Emily finds great pleasure in listening to her. Eva possesses "a fine musical ear, a quick poetic fancy, and an instinctive sympathy with what is grand and noble,"⁵⁹ all of which makes her an excellent reader.

Gerty shows her maturity in her education as well. Emily has decided that some literature beyond Gerty's comprehension will be good for her. Gerty soon finds she prefers solid reading, her favorite work being a little book on astronomy.

The child-heroine's maturity of mind and feeling more often appears in her insight, prudence, and self-control. Eva, often when faced with the sins of the world, shows "a strength of resolution singular in such a child."⁶⁰ She often speaks words of such wisdom that they seem to be divinely inspired. Mrs. Stowe comments, "Children do not usually generalize; but Eva was an uncommonly mature child, and the things that she had witnessed of the evils under which they were living had fallen, one by one, into the depths of her thoughtful,

pondering heart."⁶¹

Nell, too, possesses a thoughtful heart which enables her to act beyond her years. Her grandfather fears they will be parted and begins to cry. Instead of crying with him, she soothes him by speaking gently and jokes about the possibility of their parting, making him laugh at his fears. Nell acts the part of the adult and her grandfather becomes the child.

Gerty also acts as the guardian of Trueman when he is ill. Her maturity appears in her lack of concern over what others think when she is walking with True. The self-sufficiency helps her to learn self-control. Once she has learned to control her temper, she is like a saint; she never loses it again.

Pearl seems, like Eva, to be wise beyond her years. Very early, she knows the letter is significant and that there is a relationship between Hester and Dimmesdale. One cannot know how much is accidental in her connection of the two, how much is a response to her mother's influence, and how much is an unbelievable maturity on her part. However, Pearl's linking of the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom and Reverend Dimmesdale's act of holding his hand over his heart does seem uncommonly precocious.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing comparison of the appearance, sensibility, self-sacrifice and suffering, virtuous simplicity, and maturity of Eva, Nell, Gerty, and Pearl shows, I believe, that Pearl is not a sentimental stereotype--that, rather, she is a realistic picture of a child in her peculiar environment. Although Pearl possesses the physical beauty desirable in a sentimental child-heroine, her wildness of spirit and insensibility of feeling make her distinctive. Dark hair and eyes, a perfect shape and native grace cannot compensate for her stormy character. In fact her volatile, unpredictable nature makes her human; it is not the type to fit the myth in sentimental fiction that spontaneous action constitutes true beauty.

Human children also are extremely self-centered and selfish, unlike the sentimental child-heroine who suffers for others, sacrificing herself in a wide variety of ways to help others. The typical child-heroine spends her days and often her nights caring for someone who is suffering from a usually fatal disease. She not only nurses but also is busy with household chores, always willingly performing drudgery with saintly patience. One would think no time would be left for any other deeds, but the sentimental child finds time somewhere to attempt to redeem souls and to correct evils she sees about her.

Eva and her fictional sisters do not find time to play children's games because they're too busy helping others in various ways. Pearl, however, spends her time building boats, throwing stones, and tormenting her mother--acting like a human child. Sometimes she sympathizes with her mother's sorrows, sometimes she does not, but never does she devote twenty-four hours a day to the nursing of anyone. Neither does she set out to save the souls of her mother or father or her little Puritan tormentors. She is much too naughty to reform by example and much too busy to proselytize.

She lacks the superhuman virtue which makes the sentimental child-heroine superior to the adult. Neither does she exhibit the long-suffering, loving kindness, or patience which exemplifies the fictional child of the period. Pearl returns the hate of the Puritan children, exploits her mother's willingness to care for her, and does naughty child things, like putting her fingers in her mouth and refusing to answer the minister who catechizes her. Although Pearl does seem mature in her insight into her mother's sin and its ramifications, she is a much more true-to-life portrait of a human child than her contemporaries in fiction. In addition, she is more lifelike than most critics have given her credit for being.

NOTES

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- 3 Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York: American Book Co., 1948), p. 412.
- 4 The Novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 17.
- 5 The Sentimental Novel in America 1789-1860 (Durham, N. C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1940), p. 303.
- 6 "Dickens, Charles John Huffam," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1960.
- 7 The Sentimental Novel, p. 183.
- 8 Theodore T. Munger, "Notes on the Scarlet Letter," Atlantic Monthly, 93 (1904), 521-35.
- 9 Joseph Levi, "Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation," American Imago, 10 (1953), 291-306.
- 10 D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1951), p. 107.
- 11 Anne Wales Abbot, Review of The Scarlet Letter, A Romance, North American Review, 71 (1850), 142.
- 12 "Pearl: 1850-1955," PMLA, 72 (1957), 690.
- 13 Nathaniel Hawthorne: Transcendental Symbolist (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1969), p. 137.
- 14 F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 278.
- 15 Garlitz, 696; Review of The Scarlet Letter in The Recognition of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. B. Bernard Cohen (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Mich. Press, 1969), p. 46; Hawthorne's Fiction (Norman, Oklahoma: Univ. of Okla. Press, 1952), p. 114.
- 16 Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1957), p. 9.

- 17 "The Child Character in Hawthorne and James," Diss. Syracuse Univ. 1960, p. 125.
- 18 Nathaniel Hawthorne: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 59; "The Romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne," Westminster Review, 142 (1894), 208.
- 19 "Pearl and the Puritan Heritage," College English, 12 (1951), 323-29.
- 20 "Hawthorne's Pearl: Symbol and Character," ELH, 18 (1951), 56.
- 21 Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Viking Press, 1949), pp. 147-48.
- 22 Abel, 58; "Color, Light, and Shadow in Hawthorne's Fiction," New England Quarterly, 15 (1942), 83.
- 23 "Problems of the Scarlet Letter," Atlantic Monthly, 57 (1886), 476.
- 24 Introduction to The Scarlet Letter, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Harry Levin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. xi.
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- 27 Garlitz, 695-97.
- 28 Introduction to Four Great American Novels, ed. R. W. Short (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1946), pp. xxvii-xxviii.
- 29 Fogle, p. 114.
- 30 Masback, p. 125.
- 31 Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert Spiller, et al. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948), I, 429.
- 32 Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Criterion Books, 1960), p. 513.
- 33 Matthiessen, p. 278.
- 34 Mark Van Doren, pp. 158-59.

- 35 Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 60.
- 36 The Sentimental Novel, p. 128.
- 37 The Sentimental Novel, p. 128.
- 38 Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), p. 93.
- 39 Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin, ed. Kenneth S. Lynn (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), p. 151.
- 40 The Sentimental Novel, p. 88.
- 41 Stowe, p. 251.
- 42 Dickens, pp. 22-23.
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- 44 Cummins, p. 116.
- 45 Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter in The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: Modern Library, 1937), p. 189.
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- 47 Stowe, p. 187.
- 48 Dickens, p. 28.
- 49 "The Character of Flame: The Function of Pearl in The Scarlet Letter," American Literature, 27 (1956), 537-53.
- 50 "Motivation in The Scarlet Letter," American Literature, 28 (1957), 511-13.
- 51 Hawthorne, p. 163.
- 52 Hawthorne, p. 193.
- 53 E. Douglas Branch, The Sentimental Years 1836-1860 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1934), p. 292.
- 54 Carl Van Doren, The American Novel (New York: Macmillan Co., 1921), p. 115.

- 55 Stowe, pp. 223-24.
- 56 Stowe, p. 152.
- 57 The Children of Charles Dickens (London: Leslie Frewin, 1969), p. 87.
- 58 Cummins, p. 13.
- 59 Stowe, p. 264.
- 60 Stowe, p. 240.
- 61 Stowe, p. 280.

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