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AP English 3 – *Scarlet Letter* Essay 3

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The Real Pearl

Among many nuances present in the novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, is the mystery of Pearl. This mystery is never actually in the real person of Pearl, but in the child she appears to be. At times, the townspeople and even Pearl's mother, herself, call Pearl the demon-child, a fiend, and a torturer. Hester feels Pearl's purpose on earth is to torture her but at the same time to be her joy. In reality, Pearl is a normal child, except for the fact that she is somewhat sealed off from the rest of the world.

In the novel, Hawthorne makes it appear that Pearl is possibly an abnormal child. Chapter six is where he first discusses the child. In the sixth paragraph of that chapter, Hawthorne writes, "*Pearl was a born outcast of the infantile world. An imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants.*" Early on we see this powerful statement, which is supported by the rest of the novel. In chapter seven when Hester and Pearl are visiting the governor's mansion, Hawthorne writes, "*Pearl, in utter scorn of her mother's attempt to quiet her, gave an eldritch scream, ... because the quick and mobile curiosity of her disposition was excited by the appearance of those new personages.*" This action of Pearl's can hardly be seen as normal. Few children scream when meeting people, although many are a bit shy and stay close to their parents. One explanation, though, for this is that Pearl is not used to being around people. She had been shut off from the rest of the world because of her mother's sin and doesn't know that screaming around strangers isn't normal.

Pearl's strange actions in various situations, such as at the governor's mansion, is not the only thing in the novel that makes her appear to be abnormal. Pearl also appears to be a demon-child – the offshoot of a demon. In chapter six, the last paragraph, Hawthorne writes, "*the neighbouring townspeople ... had given out that poor little Pearl was a demon offspring.*" At times it honestly appears that Pearl is a demon-child. As a baby, Pearl points to the letter on her mother's bosom quite frequently. As she gets older, Pearl questions Hester's scarlet letter and even creates a letter out of eelgrass and places it on her bosom. It appears that Pearl is a tool to torture Hester.

Although Pearl is a constant reminder to Hester of her sin with Arthur, it is simply Pearl's nature to be curious and question her mother about the letter, it is not actually an abnormality. We see in chapter 15, when Pearl makes the scarlet letter out of the eelgrass that she does it because she is curious. Hawthorne writes in chapter 15, paragraph 10, "*I wonder if mother will ask me what it means!*" thought Pearl." This clearly shows that Pearl is simply curious as to the meaning of the scarlet letter. She is not intentionally torturing Hester, although Hester is tortured by the question. Most, if not all, children go through a stage where they ask why about almost any and everything. They're trying to figure out the reasons why things are the way they are. This is occurring in Pearl's life too. Growing up in the Puritan society, it is quite probable that Pearl saw people stand on the scaffold. As to whether she knows the meaning of the scaffold, I would guess that she doesn't. If she does, she would also be wondering what Arthur, Hester and she had done in order to be punished by standing on the scaffold. Pearl had never seen anyone stand on the scaffold at night, so she asks if they are going to stand together the next day. It's perfectly logical in her mind - it doesn't make sense for her to stand on the scaffold at night since no one has done it before. Pearl doesn't ask about standing on the scaffold the next day because she has some ulterior motive in her subconscious, she asks an honest question out of curiosity.

To further prove that Pearl is a normal child, we see Hawthorne describe her as beautiful and innocent in chapter six. At the beginning of chapter six, Hawthorne writes, "... *the infant; that little creature, whose innocent life had sprung, by the inscrutable decree of Providence, a lovely and immortal flower, out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion.*" In the next paragraph, he writes, "*Certainly, there was no physical defect. By its perfect shape, its vigor, and its natural dexterity in the use of all its untried limbs, the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of the angels, after the world's first parents were driven out. The child had a native grace which does not invariably coexist with faultless beauty; its attire, however simple, always impressed the beholder as if it were the very garb that precisely became it best.*" Although Pearl appears to be a demon-child, she cannot actually be a demon-child and be worthy of coming forth from Eden at the same time. Pearl can either be a normal child, or an abnormal one, not both.

The mystery of Pearl is never in what she actually is because the people in the story are so caught up with Hester's sin that they attribute the normal actions of a child to a devilish spirit. Had Hester been

married to Arthur and given birth to the child, Pearl would have been seen by the people as the beautiful, innocent, and curious girl she was.