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”Is the world, then, so narrow?” The  
simultaneous need for home and travel in  
Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*

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“IS THE WORLD, THEN, SO NARROW?”  
THE SIMULTANEOUS NEED FOR HOME AND TRAVEL IN  
HAWTHORNE’S *THE SCARLET LETTER*

by  
Derek McGrath

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate’s thesis adviser, Dr. Laura Barrett, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Honors College and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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paper. For now, this thesis questions how Hawthorne uses the girl to conceptualize home and travel, and I owe Dr. Elmore for the initial creative boost.

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## ABSTRACT

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In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and its preface, “The Custom-House,” the author himself and Pearl Prynne are characters who engage in travel, escaping the restrictiveness imposed onto them by their hometowns and finding greater creative freedom elsewhere. Their journey, however, is not necessarily physical but rather creative. Hawthorne and Pearl employ writing and imaginative thinking, respectively, in order to characterize Salem and Boston as foreign locations through which they may tour. The two are what Hawthorne calls “citizen[s] of somewhere else,” although they have not departed from their homes yet. By considering how “The Custom-House” relates to *The Scarlet Letter* based on the themes of travel and home, a new interpretation arises about Hawthorne’s book as well as his definition of the American romance, which posits that a person may use creativity in order to find his or her place both within and away from the community.

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## Chapter 1: "Is the world, then, so narrow?"

This thesis arises due to questions I have about Hawthorne's choice to begin *The Scarlet Letter* with a preface that details his life in Salem, Massachusetts. Rather than introduce his most recognized book with a discussion about general topics, such as his personal definition of the romance in *The House of the Seven Gables* or his comparison of living in the United States to traveling abroad in *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne offers an account about his hometown and the experiences he had at the Salem Custom-House. The preface is oddly placed chronologically, as its setting is 200 years following the events he fictionalizes in *The Scarlet Letter*. In "The Custom-House" preface, Hawthorne writes a fictional autobiography, a story about his occupations as surveyor and author in nineteenth-century New England, but with some imaginative, non-biographical instances of fancy, such as his arguments with his dead Puritan ancestors and an encounter with the ghost of a deceased surveyor. At the end of the introduction, he transitions into a tale that takes place in a much different time period and focuses on seemingly dissimilar challenges for the story's protagonist. Upon finding notes written by Jonathan Pue, the previous Custom-House official, documenting a case of adultery and exile in seventeenth-century Boston, Hawthorne offers a narrative set in the seventeenth century about a woman who must raise a child born out of wedlock while also coping with the censure of her neighbors. The woman, Hester Prynne, departs from the town with her baby, Pearl, in order to live in a cottage in the forest. She finds solace in her knitting and in service to her peers, but she continues to face condemnation for her affair, as well as her decision to remain isolated from her community. After years of criticism, she leaves Boston, only to return in her old age in order to conclude her life in the town.

Based on his decision to introduce *The Scarlet Letter* with an autobiographical narrative, the reader wonders what the events of the romance have to do with Hawthorne's work for the federal government. Granted, Hawthorne ties the two stories together through the notes of the dead surveyor, as the documents provide the historical information necessary to complete the story. The author also explains that he feels an obligation to divulge the interesting story of Hester's exile to the citizens of Salem, whom Hawthorne refers to as a rather dull mass of people living in a dilapidated community. The description of the town's indolence precedes a fascinating tale about living as an outsider. Aside from the fictional account the author presents in order to tie his preface to his romance, there are three significant similarities between the stories, each of which involves the conflict between the boring atmosphere of Hawthorne's town and the author's constrained imagination, as well as how such an imagination marks a person as an outsider within his or her community. As a result, "The Custom-House" is revealed as more than just a short autobiography, and instead as Hawthorne's attempt to introduce themes he will expand upon in *The Scarlet Letter*. By considering how the preface leads into the story itself, a new interpretation of Hawthorne's romance arises, one focusing on how creativity allows a person to find his or her place within the community while, at the same time, distancing himself or herself from the home.

The first common theme between "The Custom-House" and *The Scarlet Letter* concerns feelings of displacement experienced by the protagonist of each work. The reader likely will point to Hawthorne and Hester as the heroes of "The Custom-House" and *The Scarlet Letter*, respectively, based on their domestic struggles. The tendency to see the scarlet woman as the fictional counterpart to Hawthorne is understandable, and a number of

critics have put forward this argument.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, however, I want to look at another character in the romance who reflects Hawthorne's tribulations and characteristics; Pearl, the daughter of Hester, is a more appropriate character for demonstrating how creativity is a solution to problems of displacement. For the moment, a comparison between the author and Hester will suffice to clarify how Hawthorne's problems in "The Custom-House" have a corresponding theme in *The Scarlet Letter*. Due to their incompatibility with their communities, the author and the scarlet woman consider themselves outcasts. The former recognizes himself as an artist forced to remain in a town he finds to be decaying and whose citizens he judges as unsophisticated. His expulsion from the Salem Custom-House, resulting from changing presidencies, exacerbates Hawthorne's feelings of isolation; he regards himself as a martyr, sacrificed by his own government. Likewise, the Boston theocracy of the seventeenth century marks Hester as an outsider who is forced to wear a scarlet "A" on her clothing in order to indicate her crimes of committing adultery and refusing to identify her sexual partner. Although she is determined to wear her badge with minimal shame, she relocates from the town in order to decrease her interactions with her

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<sup>1</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch suggests Hawthorne identifies with Hester because they are both exiles in their community. In "Hester's Defiance," Nina Baym expands on the theme of exile, as she suggests Hawthorne has the outcast woman take up needlepoint in order to describe how society restricts artists. Other critics, however, are not as enthusiastic about the character. Henry James refers to her as "an accessory figure" because "it is not upon her the denouement depends" but upon the guilt and self-flagellation of Arthur Dimmesdale, Hester's tortured and intimidated lover (112). Michael Colacurcio also refers to Dimmesdale "as the indubitable center of literary organization" for the romance (119), in effect operating as the main character. As Baym notes, however, Hawthorne would not devote half of the chapters to the woman unless she was the legitimate main character ("The Significance of Plot" 51). I cannot deny that Hester shares many similarities with Hawthorne, and she does expose some of his thoughts about art, femininity, and nationalism. As Abel points out, however, Hester remains unsatisfied during either her exile in Boston or, as evident in her return to America, her travels elsewhere ("Hawthorne's Hester"). Because my argument considers the balance of a domestic life and frequent movement away from the home, Hester cannot be Hawthorne's representative about travel in *The Scarlet Letter*, as her exit from Boston is temporary, resulting in a return to permanent residency. As I will argue, Pearl's departure, in contrast to Hester's, is permanent but intermingles the concepts of home and travel.

judgmental neighbors; she, like Hawthorne, is an exile from her community because she cannot find acceptance in the town.

The second theme shared by both works involves the way in which Hawthorne and Hester employ creativity as a means of coping with their separation from the community. Surprisingly, both characters draw their imaginative solutions from the supposedly dull surroundings in which they reside. While rummaging through paperwork in his boring workplace at the Salem Custom-House, Hawthorne uncovers the notes he will use to write *The Scarlet Letter*. Furthermore, he hopes the fame of such a discovery will allow him to garner renown not only in his hometown but elsewhere so that he may leave Salem and settle in another location. Whereas Hawthorne finds solace in his writing, Hester's isolation gives her time to improve her skills at needlework. She modifies her scarlet "A" into an elaborate embroidery, contrasting with the more austere wardrobe of other Puritans and allowing her to create a distinctive style that draws attention to her at the same time her neighbors shun her. While distinguishing herself from her peers, however, Hester also uses her artwork in order to integrate into her community, providing expensive and elaborate outfits for the elite Bostonians. She also learns how to be a caregiver for her community, donating her fabrics to the poorest citizens and offering advice to the young Puritan women.

The third connection between the two characters, and the one that most interests me, concerns the author's integrating of the two other themes, in which two characters use creativity to handle the problems of exile, not only by finding places within the community but also extending themselves beyond such dull surroundings. In other words, "The Custom-House" and *The Scarlet Letter* both consider how certain characters find a creative method to distance themselves from the detrimental aspects of their homes by participating in a creative

form of travel. The preface embodies the third theme more easily because, in “The Custom-House,” Hawthorne grows tired of his interactions with Salem and decides he, at some point, must depart because he finds little about the town that appeals to his artistic sensibilities. He imagines the day he will depart from Salem, when the town will appear like a dream to him, only “the haze of memory” (35). He hopes, however, to find fame lasting beyond his age or his location and, when he departs from Salem and becomes a notable author, that “the great-grandchildren of the present race may sometimes think kindly of the scribbler of bygone days” (35), remembering Hawthorne’s name and his literary accomplishments. He plans for his departure to bring him not only to a more suitable location for his art but also to make him prominent in his old hometown.

Whereas Hawthorne makes travel an obvious theme in “The Custom-House,” understanding how itinerancy functions in *The Scarlet Letter* is more complicated. The author teases his reader with the notion that Hester will leave Salem by the end of the romance, particularly when she speaks with the minister Arthur Dimmesdale, the father of Pearl. He commiserates with his former lover, arguing that he feels guilt for his adultery and his hypocrisy in standing as a minister to his congregation when he refuses to admit his sin to the community. During a meeting in the forest, Hester notes that neither one of them is forced to remain in Salem and face the criticism of their peers; rather, there is an entire world beyond New England, a larger number of destinations than the pessimistic Dimmesdale imagines. He, however, moans that “[i]t cannot be!” because, according to him, the pair cannot escape the guilt of their sins. Whereas Hester imagines that Dimmesdale can retreat elsewhere, perhaps working as “the teacher and apostle of the red men” in the forest, or voyaging across the Atlantic to another nation, the reverend can only complain that his home,

or, rather, the site of his sin and therefore his punishment, remains in Boston: “Wretched and sinful as I am, I have had no other thought than to drag on my earthly existence in the sphere where Providence hath placed me” (Chapter XVII: 127). Hester, presumably speaking with the same desire to abandon Boston that Hawthorne has to abandon Salem, counters Dimmesdale’s protests: “Is the world, then, so narrow?” she asks. “So brief a journey would bring thee from a world where thou hast been most wretched, to one where thou mayest still be happy!” (Chapter XVII: 127). Her emphasis on escape leads the reader to think Hester functions as a traveler, or maybe the principal traveler, in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Hester and Dimmesdale’s simplistic aspirations for traveling, however, are impossible in *The Scarlet Letter* both for themselves and, and, to an extent, also for Hawthorne in “The Custom-House.” Despite their agreement in the forest to depart with Pearl on a ship bound for Europe, neither Hester nor Dimmesdale leaves Boston, both finding their demise in the town. As Dimmesdale reminds Hester as he lies dying, God intended for him to find salvation by remaining in the town and not by pursuing a life away from Boston with his child’s mother: “[I]t was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion. God knows; and He is merciful! [...] By bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people!” (Chapter XXIII: 162). The author refuses to allow Hester and Dimmesdale to escape their sin; instead, they must finish their lives amongst the Puritans who induce such guilt in the couple. Hester, shortly following Dimmesdale’s death, leaves with Pearl for unknown areas, but she returns many years later to her forest cottage, completing her life as the nurse and adviser to young women in Boston. The narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* presents different possible explanations for why she remains, either to face the punishment of her sin in the town, much as Dimmesdale

hoped to do, or in order to be near her deceased lover. In any case, Hawthorne does not allow Hester to be the primary traveler of the romance, as she has sinned and, therefore, cannot be such a “destined prophetess” (Chapter XXIV: 166).

Hawthorne also ends his “Custom-House” preface still living in Salem. He remains in his birthplace due to misgivings he has about his renown in any other location and the responsibilities he has to his ancestors, the old men who have provided him with minimal fame and sufficient literary fodder. His forefathers are the most significant reason for his continuing presence in Salem. Hawthorne considers it his “destiny to make Salem [his] home” because of “this long connection of a family with one spot, as its place of birth and burial, creat[ing] a kindred between the human being and the locality” (13, 12). He does refer to himself as “a citizen of somewhere else” (35), which would suggest he finds some form of escape, but his inability to identify where “somewhere else” is leaves his final outcome open-ended, hence more imagined than actual; he is not literally traveling but traveling through what he writes. In Chapter 2, I will explain why he makes this comment regardless of whether or not he has left Salem at the conclusion to “The Custom-House,” as well as what I mean by referring to literature as a form of travel. For the moment, I want to consider only how Hawthorne remains in his neighborhood upon completion of his preface, despite his promises to himself that he would not remain in a place as uninspiring for his artistic sensibilities as Salem is.

The only character who succeeds in permanently leaving by the end of Hawthorne’s romance is Pearl. At the conclusion of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester returns to Boston, but Pearl is not with her; according to rumors, the daughter resides in an “unknown region of Europe,” married to a man of similarly anonymous nationality and expecting a child (Chapter XXIV:

165). Whereas Hawthorne and Pearl's parents complete their stories in the town that so frustrated them, she finds a happier life elsewhere, married to a wealthy man of notable heritage and raising children in an area far less austere and judgmental than Puritan Boston. Pearl starts a family in a different location, finding the "other birthplaces" that Hawthorne desired for his own children, places that would allow them to "strike their roots into unaccustomed earth" (13).

What is different about Pearl that allows her to leave whereas other characters must remain in the colony, or even refuse to depart from Boston? The impetus for her removal relates to her stifling surroundings and her budding creativity. Other characters remain in New England: Hester returns to Boston because "there was a more real life [...] here" (Chapter XXIV: 165); Dimmesdale completes his punishment at the site of his sin; and Hawthorne himself has difficulty leaving the town to which he is bound by ancestral ties. Based on her mother's characteristic resistance towards her neighbors, as well as her author's own frustrations with his home in "The Custom-House," Pearl develops into a character who leaves Boston for the same reasons as Hester and Hawthorne. She suffers from displacement from her community; she is an exile like her mother, denigrated by townspeople as an illegitimate child, not only a bastard but also perhaps a demon, seeming too intelligent and too wicked to be of normal birth.<sup>2</sup> Like her mother and Hawthorne, Pearl's initial solution for distancing herself from her dull surroundings is to make her dull surroundings into a source of creativity. She imagines companions in nature and the animals she encounters in the forest; she summons opponents for her games, "never creat[ing] a friend, but seem[ing] always to be sowing broadcast the dragon's teeth, whence sprung a harvest of armed enemies,

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<sup>2</sup> In Chapter 3, I will consider how Pearl functions as an exile from her community, but I will also note how her very status as an outsider also allow her to be a participant, hence a citizen, of Boston.



against whom she rushed to battle” (Chapter VI: 65). She finds creative ways to interact with people unlike herself, such as the Native Americans and the European sailors that arrive for the holiday festival. She even forms relationships with people who remain hostile to her, such as her strict Puritan neighbors who employ her as the punisher of Hester’s sins. As she moves between these social circles, she is in the process of escaping into different locations, traveling within her home. She is too wily, too creative to be confined to one location. She is another artist in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Other critics are not as kind about Pearl’s important role in the romance; just as she is condemned in fictionalized Boston, many scholars denigrate her as well, mainly for being too unrealistic. Darrel Abel argues that the girl is only a symbol for Hawthorne’s use, a literary “failure” that “serves her author’s ideas too well to assume a convincing life of her own” (“Hawthorne’s Pearl” 66). W. H. Barnes as well refers to her as “most artificial and unchildlike” (59 qtd in Garlitz 689). Critics refuse to see Pearl as a legitimate character, but they ignore the greater significance she has in *The Scarlet Letter*. Yes, Pearl is an artistic creation, a fictional character that Hawthorne manipulates, one that will not seem childlike, but her unnaturalness is because she is not an actual child. In other words, the critics misunderstand what she is supposed to be; she is not a real character, and her fabricated quality is necessary in order to make an *ideal*, not realistic, model for what Hawthorne wants to gain from creativity, that being an escape from the detriments of home. Rather than worrying about how true *The Scarlet Letter* is to life, it is more important to determine what Hawthorne accomplishes with this book; throughout, he is able to create an example for what he sees as the best way to travel in order to distance oneself from the boring aspects of home. With this thesis, I want to resolve the problems some scholars have in determining what to do

with Pearl. In distinction from the range of interpretations offered—as “an imbodyed [*sic*] angel from the skies,” “a void little demon,” or a child of nature, hence “of moral indifference, as one not born into the moral order” (Giles 76; Loring 494; Johnson 44; all qtd. in Garlitz 689)—I will argue that she is both an angel and a demon, a model that is both helpful and complicated because it reveals Pearl as existing simultaneously outside and inside the moral order of Boston, hence both an exile from and a resident of the town.

The parallel between Pearl’s creation and her mother’s artistry is an interesting topic,<sup>3</sup> but, for this thesis, I want to compare Pearl to Hawthorne, as both end their respective stories not with resignation that they will have to return to their homes but, in the case of the former, a seeming decision not to go back to Boston<sup>4</sup> and, in the case of the latter, a resolve to leave his birthplace forever. Hawthorne centers *The Scarlet Letter* around the theme of finding travel through more imaginative means. By considering a different way in which “The Custom-House” relates to *The Scarlet Letter*, namely through the themes of stagnation from residency and the supplemental benefits of travel, a large, encompassing argument arises that

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<sup>3</sup> Chester E. Eisinger, for example, notes that Pearl inherits her mother’s creativity because she “is heir, then, not only to a passion that transcended the moral law but to an intellect that was at once free and subject to confusion” because of Hester’s sin and ostracism (326). Nina Baym as well sees Pearl as both the work of art and the creator of art. “Pearl is an entirely ‘original’ form, springing [...] from sources largely beyond the artist’s [Hester’s] control,” such that she is as much an artist as her mother, “symboliz[ing] a part of Hester’s nature—the wild, amoral, creative core of the self” (“Passion and Authority” 220). In other words, Pearl is an artist in that she is a creator that simultaneously appears as art, “the scarlet letter endowed with life!” (Chapter VII: 69).

<sup>4</sup> I am intrigued by the possibility that Pearl decides on her own not to return, based on her childhood inclination to disobey the orders of others, as well as possible hostility she may have towards the Puritans for the punishments they inflicted on her mother. As the penultimate chapter notes, however, Pearl no longer “do[es] battle with the world, but [is] a woman in it” (Chapter XXIII: 162). The remark suggests that she neither intends to rebel against the Puritans, nor leaves Boston in order to avoid their strict rules. In fact, based on the information Hawthorne provides about her life in Europe, Pearl may be unable to come back to Boston. She is married and must care for her children rather than globetrotting between Boston and Europe, or she may be mimicking her mother’s devotion to Dimmesdale, as Pearl will similarly remain with her husband and never travel away from him. Hawthorne does not present sufficient evidence for us to be able to know for certain the reasons behind Pearl’s permanent removal from Boston; as he writes in the final chapter, “[n]one knew—nor ever learned, with the fulness of perfect certainty” whatever became of “the elf-child” (Chapter XXIV: 165). Therefore, rather than argue that Pearl leaves out of rebellion in a manner similar to that of Hawthorne, I can only note that she never happens to return to her hometown whereas Hawthorne outright refuses to come back.

incorporates, hence reconciles, many supposedly contradicting arguments by critics for more than 150 years about how the preface relates to the story itself. Organized in this manner, my thesis will provide insight for two points. First, I will analyze what Hawthorne thinks it means to be a citizen or a traveler; I will go into more detail in the body of this argument, but, for now, both concepts are closely related to what the author thinks is the importance of art. Second, because each work provides an answer about how to travel without abandoning his birthplace, Hawthorne's art has a purpose, to be the avenue for travel. Rather than functioning as art for art's sake, or even art for a financial profit, Hawthorne's writing serves to balance his obligations to his neighborhood against his desire to distance himself from a dull environment.<sup>5</sup> By learning a method in which his writing can allow him to find something both beyond his home and inside his home, hence allowing him to be active rather than succumbing to the lethargy of Salem, Hawthorne fulfills the order Hester gives to Dimmesdale: "Preach! Write! Act! Do anything, save to lie down and die!" (Chapter XVII: 127). Hawthorne, unlike Dimmesdale, follows Hester's advice and escapes through his writing.

As one of my secondary goals in this thesis is to demonstrate how "The Custom-House" serves as an appropriate introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, I acknowledge that many critics have their own perspectives on what relevance the preface has to the story. Carlanda

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<sup>5</sup> While completing the last parts of this thesis, I came upon George G. Dekker's *The Fictions of Romantic Tourism: Radcliffe, Scott, and Mary Shelley*. Dekker had intended for his study to include research on Hawthorne's views on travels, but he chose instead to focus on British rather than American Romanticism (ix). Nevertheless, his views on travel, although not originally leading my argument, parallel my own. Dekker thinks the process of travel ties closely with the process of writing, in that both allow for escape from tedium: "[British] Romantic tourists and novelists shared an aesthetic that effectively defined both tour and novel as privileged spaces exempt from the boring routines and hampering contingencies of ordinary life and rich with opportunities for imaginative transport" (3). Dekker's argument about British romanticism relates very well with the point I am making, as *The Scarlet Letter* employs notions of travel and writing in order to suggest that a boring environment is not permanent but only temporary.

Green suggests that Hawthorne's tenure at the Salem Custom-House is comparable to a journey through hell, a harmful though necessary experience in order to become a better artist. I would add, however, that Hawthorne's situation is comparable to Hester and Pearl's ordeals, which also make them better people; Hester improves her artwork while in isolation, and, Pearl, through her interactions with Dimmesdale, learns empathy and, rather than "forever do[ing] battle with the world, [...] be[comes] a woman in it" (Chapter XXIII: 162).<sup>6</sup> Green's point is consistent with Paul John Eakin's argument, emphasizing art and unpleasant experiences as two themes connecting "The Custom-House" to *The Scarlet Letter*. According to Eakin, Hawthorne desires isolation, determining to keep far enough away from his neighbors so that he may complete his work without becoming as dull as they are, but sufficiently close to these people in order to make them the subjects of his writing. Dan McCall offers a differing perspective, as he suggests both "The Custom-House" and *The Scarlet Letter* concern not the need for isolation but the problems with such separation. Whereas Green and Eakin consider isolation to be the only way in which Hawthorne may maintain his art, McCall suggests that the author has to balance his separation from the community with a simultaneous connection to his home, ultimately deciding to remain in isolation while also engaging with his home. Of the three critics, McCall makes the argument that is closest to the point I make in this thesis.

Although Green, Eakin, and McCall make strong arguments for different ways in which "The Custom-House" leads into *The Scarlet Letter*, there are possible counter-arguments, although ones with which I do not agree, that Hawthorne does not include the preface for any thematic reason. As he explains in a footnote, Hawthorne planned to have

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<sup>6</sup> I do not mean that Pearl is necessarily the stereotypical docile woman. Rather, she is simply a participant in her community, a citizen of the world; in that way, I think she is a traveler.

“The Custom-House” begin a collection of short stories. Assuming the preface serves as a suitable introduction by reflecting on similar themes found in the subsequent works, rather than as a random tale about his life in Salem, Hawthorne would find difficulty in writing one narrative that suited every account included in the collection. Concerning this counter-argument, a critic could argue that perhaps Hawthorne “thought advisable to defer” the “several shorter tales and sketches” (34 n) and keep only *The Scarlet Letter* because he wanted a simpler preface that related to only one story. Furthermore, “The Custom-House” may stand alone as Hawthorne’s indictment of his town, an extended critique of Salem, his coworkers, and the political groups who instigated his ousting from the federal government; thus, the introduction may be the author’s venting of frustration rather than a significant contribution to *The Scarlet Letter*. As I argue, “The Custom-House” is not an unrelated narrative but one that influences the reader’s interpretation of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Whereas critics have argued that “The Custom-House” is either an appropriate introduction, based on its treatment of hardships, the theory of art, and isolation, or an unrelated satire concerning Hawthorne’s frustrations with Salem, the two stances actually come to the same conclusion, by looking at the preface’s relation to *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of travel, as an action manifested in literature and creativity. I want to suggest that, by looking at the romance and its introduction through the theme of travel, the arguments about art, isolation, and his birthplace are interconnected, and the varying arguments of other critics can be reconciled. Through art, Hawthorne balances his need for isolation from and integration into the community, allowing him both to respect and to mock Salem, to escape and endure his hardships, to wander and to remain at home. Sacvan Bercovitch makes a similar argument, suggesting that Hawthorne uses the preface to the second edition of *The*

*Scarlet Letter* to relate to and to distance himself from Salem. When Hawthorne faced criticism from his neighbors that he was too mean-spirited in his characterization of his town, he defended “The Custom-House” by arguing that the preface is a work of “frank and genuine good-humor” without any “enmity, or ill-feeling of any kind” (5). According to Bercovitch, Hawthorne balances home and his separation from it by “attest[ing] to his engagement with community” (115), having written a sketch of his “respectable community” with such “a kindl[y] spirit” (*The Scarlet Letter* 5). At the same time, however, Bercovitch argues that Hawthorne recognizes “his self-conscious connection to his *radical* heroine,” as he behaves defiantly like the younger Hester, to separate himself as she does from the community by mocking those he considers his unsophisticated neighbors. In both cases, neither Hawthorne nor Hester “really submits to the public” (Bercovitch 115). As I will note throughout this thesis, the difference between my argument and the argument of critics such as Bercovitch is that I am focusing on Pearl and positing that she, and not Hester, is the only traveler to remove herself successfully from her home. Both the mother and the daughter are “two wayfarers[, who come] within the precincts of the town,” straddling the imaginary line between the forest and civilization and then depart (Chapter VII: 69), but, whereas Hester eventually returns to Boston, Pearl never comes back.<sup>7</sup>

The thesis is organized to consider first how travel functions in each work and concludes with a comparison of the preface and the story. With each chapter, however, it becomes evident that Hawthorne’s theme of travel is not literal but imaginative, a result of

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<sup>7</sup> Again, in order to separate the fictional Hawthorne from the real-life Hawthorne, I must note that the author similarly attempted to remove himself from Salem, evinced by his career following *The Scarlet Letter* as American consul in London. Whether his subsequent return is similar to Hester’s, what he refers to in “The Custom-House” as “a home-feeling with the past” (11), I cannot argue based on the text alone; such an argument requires looking at the author’s biography. I only want to note that Hawthorne, in real-life, may not have had the same success as Pearl or his fictional counterpart, but, as my thesis relies on textual evidence, I avoid offering an answer about the author’s problems.

reframing what it means to leave our birthplaces and, with some creative thinking, how to manipulate what we perceive to be the unchangeable borders of our towns. The topic for Chapter 2 is Hawthorne's conflict in "The Custom-House," arising from his desire to engage in itinerancy alongside his conflicting responsibilities to his neighborhood. As he determines how to remove himself from his uninteresting hometown while fulfilling the obligations he thinks his ancestors expect from him, Hawthorne realizes a way in which he may travel through literature while remaining at home. His example of journeying within the community finds its model in *The Scarlet Letter* through Pearl, as she is able to thrive in a variety of locations with a variety of people. In Chapter 3, I will consider how Pearl is a traveler-within-home, treating parts of Boston as if they are different nations for her to explore. This chapter focuses on how Pearl's encounters with varying locales and people prepare her for her departure to Europe. Because her actions correspond to much of what Hawthorne touches upon in the preface, the preface must be considered in order to understand Pearl's engagement in creativity and travel throughout the story. Both the "The Custom-House" and the story of Hester Prynne's daughter demonstrate how a character can follow through on his or her responsibilities to the community—Hawthorne's to his ancestors and Pearl's to the Puritan theocracy in Boston—while escaping through more creative means; in other words, the author gets away through literature, and the little girl flees through play with animals, forests, and guests from other locations, and even through her creative means of punishing her mother. I will consider the commonality between Hawthorne and Pearl in the final chapter, in which, by comparing the preface and the tale, I will argue that the girl functions as a model for what principles the author dictates in "The Custom-House."

Chapter 2: Transporting thought:  
Hawthorne's travel through literature in "The Custom-House"

Hawthorne, in order to introduce *The Scarlet Letter*, begins with a narrative about Salem, Massachusetts, an account in which he considers the allure of travel, the restrictions of home, and his own indecision about leaving his birthplace. In "The Custom-House," a story set during the author's time as a surveyor for the United States government, Hawthorne characterizes his location as "a dilapidated wharf" (8), lacking art, activity, and imagination, all of which results in a community unsuitable for the type of artist he wants to be. Determining that his native land is dull and uninspiring for his artistic tastes, Hawthorne realizes he will be "invariably happiest elsewhere" (11). He cannot find affection for the town when "it would be quite as reasonable to form a sentimental attachment to a disarranged checker-board" (11). Because he will no longer dwell in his old neighborhood, the likely solution seems to be traveling to another setting. Hawthorne thinks itinerancy is important because, at some point, "the connection [with Salem], which has become an unhealthy one, should at last be severed" (13). Before stating his decision to leave, however, he expresses doubts about having the stamina to depart, as he argues that an ancestral link to the locale, what he describes not as sentiment but as "instinct" (12), may transform the area into his permanent, forever-imprisoning domicile: "I felt it almost as a destiny to make Salem my home" (13). Hawthorne faces a problem; any other scene would be more suitable than his New England abode, yet his family's influence on the region persuades him to remain there.

After noting both his incompatibility with his birthplace and his intimate relation to the town, Hawthorne declares that he will become "a citizen of somewhere else" (35), yet, by



the end of the preface, he has not left Salem for a new location. Neither excursions away from his hometown nor continuous residency appeals to him. The solution to the conflict between his urge to leave and his inability to do so is in the very phrase “a citizen of somewhere else.” The context of the quote comes from his discussion about the intangibility of his hometown. Salem, he argues, now “ceases to be a reality of my life” because the community can be found only

through the haze of memory, a mist brooding over and around it; as if it were no portion of the real earth, but an overgrown village in cloud-land, with only imaginary inhabitants to people its wooden houses and walk its homely lanes, and the unpicturesque prolixity of its main street. (35)

Hawthorne’s process for becoming a citizen of somewhere else is one of transforming his physical surroundings into the imaginations of his mind. At the end of “The Custom-House,” he has not left Salem yet but proceeds to characterize the location as a memory, an idea he may alter and reform to correspond to his desires. The author can be a traveler to some other place, if only in his mind, while continuing to inhabit Salem. Hawthorne writes about areas and times away from nineteenth-century New England, and his mind can depart from his residence although his body remains in town.

As a character in “The Custom-House,” Hawthorne writes in order to achieve his goal of integrating home and itinerancy, a process of finding his place within the community while simultaneously distancing himself from the home. He thinks this process is necessary for two reasons: First, in order to maintain his ancestral connection to the Puritans, which offers him fame as well as the inspiration for *The Scarlet Letter*, and, second, to keep himself distant enough from the overbearing ennui of Salem, which can hinder his art. In order to support my claim in this chapter, I will first present a short critical history of “The Custom-

House” as concerns scholarship about literature as a form of journey. It is important to look at what previous scholars have written about this preface in order to strengthen my claim that Hawthorne uses literature as a way to relate to his home and distance himself from it. Next, I will determine the cause for Hawthorne’s conflict about whether to leave the town. Finally, I will propose that writing, according to Hawthorne’s argument in “The Custom-House,” incorporates the benefits of both travel and home while simultaneously counteracting their negative effects.

Literature as a temporary passage into another setting is not a new way of reading *The Scarlet Letter*, as many critics have found textual evidence to suggest that the concept of creative writing in “The Custom-House” functions as an outlet for his treks. *The Scarlet Letter*, according to Anne W. Abbott, allows Hawthorne to “[feel] this sort of intoxication,” as if “floating or flying between earth and heaven” (245), as if moving, or traveling, between the very actual earth and the more imaginary heaven. Abbott is describing the author’s concept of the Romance, in which he shuffles between the Actual to the Imaginary, existing “somewhere between the real world and fairy-land” (*The Scarlet Letter* 29). His literature, therefore, is more than the flight between earth and heaven that Abbott describes but also a means of engaging in travel away from the dilapidated wharfs of Salem; Abbott argues that *The Scarlet Letter* concerns travel but does not say it specifically enough. Many years after Abbott releases her article, Frederick Newberry and John Carlos Rowe consider travel, or, more specifically, transnationality, as a theme in “The Custom-House.” Newberry determines that Hawthorne “look[s] beyond America to England for an artistic spirit and tradition to carry out his resolve” (139). He manifests this desire with his fictional counterpart’s interaction with Pue’s ghost. The process of looking elsewhere develops into

travel, as he transcends the boundary between North America and Europe, as well as life and death, in order to communicate with Pue and find the inspiration necessary to compose a work that Newberry considers largely influenced by English history and aesthetics. Rowe, following Newberry's argument, focuses more on the transnational aspects of the preface whereas I want to consider how travel exists in "The Custom-House." Nevertheless, as Rowe asserts, "Hawthorne is a 'citizen of somewhere else' when he leaves the material world of the Custom-House to enter the realm of his imagination" (93), to have his mind wander elsewhere while his body remains in Salem. What I want to add to Rowe's point, in addition to bringing it into dialogue with the claims offered by Abbott and Newberry, is that Hawthorne recognizes how incomplete his life will be should he pursue only travel away from Salem or make the dilapidated wharf into his permanent residence. Whereas critics tend to emphasize either that Hawthorne wants to remain at home or that he wants to engage in constant travel, I am arguing that Hawthorne desires the balance of both, and the means of doing so is through the written word. Through writing, Hawthorne determines how to maintain connections with two different locations, his home in Actuality and his travel destinations in Imagination, in order to contend with the inadequacies of both places.

The primary problem Hawthorne has with his hometown is its lack of inspiration. Many of his complaints are about the absence of aesthetic value from Salem's layout and the lack of spirit and creativity amongst the citizens. Hawthorne, seeing only uniformity and languidness, concludes that his native land is incompatible with his literary inclinations. For example, the local buildings and layout are uninspiring, tending to maintain the same appearance over many years, leading to architectural ruin and the absence of anything new. The buildings are decaying, "hav[ing] sunk almost out of sight" (12), as well as dull, with

“few or none of [them] pretend[ing] to architectural beauty” (10). Because the buildings lack aesthetic value and “architectural beauty,” Salem “is neither picturesque nor quaint, but only tame” (10). The key word, “tame,” emphasizes Hawthorne’s opinion that his town lacks variety, consisting only of “flat, unvaried surface” (10), hardly creative but instead uniform, contrasting with Hawthorne’s search for something imaginative.

As Hawthorne continues to discuss the banality of his neighborhood, he emphasizes the lack of activity in his community, describing the main street as “long and lazy” (10). His coworkers at the Custom-House engage in very little work, as “[t]hey spen[d] a good deal of time [...] asleep in their accustomed corners, with their chairs tilted back against the walls” (15). These lazy, old men fail to complete their tasks, many times only engaging in perfunctory chores, “[going] through the various formalities of office,” searching boats that dock in the port and making “their fuss about little matters,” but failing to notice the smuggling that is going on in the harbor and allowing this greater crime “to slip between their fingers” (15). Hawthorne ties the employees’ inability to complete their jobs not only to their languor but also to the depressed local economy. Salem once “was a bustling wharf,” which “made the Custom-House a stirring scene” (9), but the district “is now burdened with decayed wooden warehouses, and exhibits few or no symptoms of commercial life” (8). Fewer people walk through the streets, allowing pathways to become overrun with vegetation: “The pavement round about [...] the Custom-House of the port—has green enough growing in its chinks to show that it has not, of late days, been worn by any multitudinous resort of business” (9). The lack of movement in the area allows the old men to remain more inert, contributing to the further decrease of activity taking place in Salem.

The idleness in Hawthorne's town becomes particularly frustrating for him because of the resulting lack of curiosity and creativity amongst his coworkers at the Custom-House. Due to the pressures he imagines are put onto him by his ancestors, the pressures to be only a surveyor rather than balancing two identities as bureaucrat and artist, the author thinks he must restrict his imagination if he is to fit into this uninteresting environment. Although some characters, such as the General, may have stories to tell about his military victories, "[t]he evolutions of the parade; the tumult of the battle; the flourish of old, heroic music" (20), the conversations amongst Hawthorne's coworkers consist for the most part of "the several thousandth repetition of old sea-stories and mouldy [*sic*] jokes" (15). Anything these old men have to say is integrated into the local language and becomes commonplace so that the ideas "grow[] to be passwords and countersigns among them" (15). Communication becomes cliché and worn-out to the same extent that the architecture is uniform, all of which results from the absence of innovation and change. Although the stories may become repetitive, Hawthorne discovers some of his employees are innovative and interested in literature, such as a young clerk who scribbles poetry, or the Naval Officer who "would often engage [Hawthorne] in a discussion about one or the other of his favorite topics, Napoleon or Shakespeare" (23), but such instances are few. For the most part, Hawthorne thinks his participation in such a dull environment requires that he resist any conversations about art and beauty and instead focus only on being a Custom-House surveyor. He may pride himself that authors such as Robert Burns and Geoffrey Chaucer previously toiled as surveyors, but Hawthorne notes that no one else at his office is interested in what he has to say about literature: "None of them, I presume, had ever read a page of my inditing, or would have cared a fig the more for me if they had read them all" (23). His job at the Custom-House

thus prevents him from engaging in writing, demonstrating his creativity, and expressing his own personality.

After giving his many complaints about Salem, Hawthorne concludes that “[t]here has never been [...] the genial atmosphere [in this town] which a literary man requires in order to ripen the best harvest of his mind” (35). His community, artistically deficient, is not an appropriate environment for his talents, nor are the coworkers with whom he surrounds himself. Because there is so little creativity in the community, its citizens focus on physical objects immediately present rather than things that require theoretical thought. For example, as Newberry notes, the Custom-House officers can remember sailing missions or favorite foods, and they focus on earning their paychecks and accumulating wealth, but, when considering history and abstract thoughts, they are stymied. As Newberry states:

Old jokes, old snores, and old meals merely deaden one’s spirit. Commerce and trade (the obsessive materialism of the present), along with their recorded transactions, have no lasting value; commodities carry Hawthorne’s name stamped on their crates to places where he hopes it “will never go again.” On this first story of the Custom House [building], therefore, [Hawthorne] finds nothing aesthetically or historically appealing. (160)

The continuous deterioration of art and industry, the unchanging uniformity of the locale’s architecture and streets, and the inability of the citizens to devise new thoughts all contribute to an environment that is material rather than conceptual. Hawthorne’s coworkers focus on meals and profits rather than considering the many historical documents located on the upper story of their office building or the creativity expressed by literature.

Due to his emphasis on the need for communal imagination, one that would provide a more inspirational environment if he could only travel to somewhere else, Hawthorne establishes creativity as the opposite of permanence. By correlating imagination to

transience, however, Hawthorne already has framed his tenure at the Custom-House's opposition to his artistic abilities. Because he remains in one place for an extended period of time, the author loses his ability to write, and continued exposure to his workplace might have prevented him from writing his most notable romance:

So little adapted is the atmosphere of a Custom-House to the delicate harvest of fancy and sensibility, that, had I remained there through ten Presidencies yet to come, I doubt whether the tale of 'The Scarlet Letter' would ever have been brought before the public eye. (28)

Engaged in the repetitive movements of reading and approving paperwork, writing only a few words daily in his government documents rather than attempting to find inspired words for a creative story, Hawthorne believes his mind as he works in the Custom-House is

a tarnished mirror. It would not reflect, or only with miserable dimness, the figures with which I did my best to people it. The characters of the narrative would not be warmed and rendered malleable by any heat that I could kindle at my intellectual forge. They would take neither the glow of passion nor the tenderness of sentiment, but retained all the rigidity of dead corpses. (28)

Hawthorne, engaged in conflict with his words, even believes that the characters “stared [him] in the face with a fixed and ghastly grin of contemptuous defiance” (28), remarking that their author has sacrificed his imagination for the money earned in repetitive labor. He thinks his characters claim he has lost “[t]he little power [he] might have once possessed over the tribe of unrealities” because he has “[has] bartered it for a pittance of the public gold.” With that, his imaginary creations dismiss him: “Go then, and earn your wages!” (28). Hawthorne's characters, mocking him, refer to the government paycheck, what Hawthorne considers the cause for his lapsed creativity. Having sold his writing as stamps and signatures rather than as literature, he finds his abilities waning. Hawthorne characterizes the effect as enticement, as if “Uncle Sam's gold [...] has, in this respect, a quality of enchantment like that of the

devil's wages" (31). In trade for such wealth, however, Hawthorne must give up, "if not his soul, yet many of its better attributes; its sturdy force, its courage and constancy, its truth, its self-reliance, and all that gives the emphasis to manly character" (31). Without such traits, his literature will suffer; his resolve to write will diminish, he will not choose to contend with any risk that promotes courageousness, and his independence will dissipate. In other words, he will become as lethargic and non-confrontational as the Custom-House employees are.

Home, for the author, now relates to both the inability to leave and the inability to write, suggesting that the perpetuation of one is also the cause for the other. His writer's block and inoperable imagination while at the Custom-House lead Hawthorne to fear he will never escape Salem, and yet, in a circular process that reinforces both the need to escape and the need to write, what leads Hawthorne to change his mind about remaining in the community is the fear that he will no longer be able to create art. By prolonging his departure from the Custom-House, Hawthorne becomes mentally weaker and thus less able to depart:

An effect—which I believe to be observable, more or less, in every individual who has occupied the position [e.g., surveyor of the Salem Custom-House]—is, that, while he leans on the mighty arm of the Republic, his own proper strength departs from him. He loses, in an extent proportioned to the weakness or force of his regional nature, the capability of self-support. (31)

Abbott considers how "The Custom-House" describes the author's frustration with the deadening atmosphere of Hawthorne's former workplace and how such tediousness harms his mind, hence his creativity: "A man who has so rare an individuality to lose may well shudder at the idea of becoming a soulless machine, a sort of official scarecrow" (243). Hawthorne concludes that he has changed from an author to a simplistic bureaucrat: "I had ceased to be a writer of tolerably poor tales and essays, and had become a tolerably good



Surveyor of the Customs. That was all” (30). Confronting the possibility that he may not be able to continue writing and will change into a sub-satisfactory surveyor, he becomes fearful; much as he worries that he is destined never to leave his hometown, Hawthorne thinks that he will continue to return to the Custom-House in search of work rather than engaging in the travel necessary to reinvigorate his mind: “His pervading and continual hope [...] is, that finally, and in no long time, by some happy coincidence of circumstances, he shall be restored to office” (31). Hawthorne knows such a hope is only a “hallucination” (31).

Realizing that he cannot return to the Custom-House and his work with the federal government, Hawthorne can now accomplish his two tasks: he can finish his story without the distractions of monotonous paperwork and lazy employees, and he can depart from his boring hometown. What Hawthorne now needs to determine is the sequence in which he will carry out his plan. The solution seems to be either first to abandon Salem and then to pursue his writing in another location, or to get through the writing process first and find a subsequent escape in another way. The former option of literal travel, however, becomes problematic for two reasons. First, by leaving his town, Hawthorne would lose the benefits he garners from his ancestral connection to Salem; I will consider this point in a moment. The second problem is evident when Hawthorne actually begins to write the story of Hester Prynne. When Hawthorne leaves his office each day in order to continue his writing at his home, the writing process is no more productive because his writer’s block follows him wherever he goes. After having previously noticed how the moonlight changes his perception of objects, Hawthorne now finds that such nuances escape him:

[D]uring the whole of my Custom-House experience, moonlight and sunshine, and the glow of firelight, were just alike in my regard; and neither of them was of one whit more avail than the twinkle of a tallow-candle. An entire class of susceptibilities,

and a gift connected with them—of no great richness or value, but the best I had—was gone from me. (30)

The problem may be the Custom-House's dull environment, but the effects have manifested themselves in Hawthorne's mind and are no longer restricted to any particular place.

Removal from the Custom-House is insufficient for rejuvenating his creative abilities, but Hawthorne finds he can gain some benefits by removing himself from Salem. As he notes, "[h]uman nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and re-planted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil" (13). Frequent movement is necessary in order to make a person adapt to new situations, but it is inadequate unless there is a change in Hawthorne's mindset as well.

Hawthorne's situation in "The Custom-House" corresponds to an argument Ralph Waldo Emerson makes about the American who thinks he can saunter away from his domestic problems:

Traveling is a fool's paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places. [...] I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea, and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from. (Emerson 160)

As a citizen of New England no matter where he goes, Hawthorne must realize that his solution to his problems with home and writing is not physical but mental, not a literal voyage but a change in his mindset; he needs to give himself some mental distance from his dull hometown, along with, or even regardless of, physical distance. Although Emerson goes on to assert that "[o]ur minds travel when our bodies are forced to stay at home," such that "the rage of traveling is a symptom of a deeper unsoundness of affecting the whole intellectual action" (160), I want to suggest that itinerancy does not have a negative effect on

the mind but provides a solution for its insecurity. Rather than remain stagnant, Hawthorne sees the journey as beneficial, an opportunity to get away from the negative aspects of his life.

Aside from the fruitlessness of physical travel without mental distance from the situation, Hawthorne's separation from Salem is disadvantageous due to the ancestral link he has with the town. Although the neighborhood lacks the creative spirit he desires for his literature, Hawthorne knows his family has a long-standing and notorious connection to the community, starting with the voyage from England up to the settlement of the land, alongside the colonial assaults on Native Americans, Quakers, and alleged witches as carried out by his elders. Hawthorne's renown in the region is miniscule, as his coworkers in the Custom-House are unfamiliar with the books he has written, ones that may receive critical praise but not widespread popularity. People in Salem do not recognize him because of his literature, but they do know he is the descendant of Salem's founders. He determines that his attachment to the town, for better or for worse, depends on his ancestor, William Hathorne: "I seem to have a stronger claim to a residence here on account of this grave, bearded, sable-cloaked, and steeple-crowned progenitor [...] than for myself, whose name is seldom heard and my face hardly known" (11). William's historical influence on the region makes "Hathorne" and, by extension, "Hawthorne" recognizable names in the area. To accept such fame, however, is to take upon himself the sins of his forefathers: "I, the present writer, as their representative, hereby take shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse incurred by them [...] may be now and henceforth removed" (12). Hawthorne does not specify whether such shame spurs his desire to leave, but he does blame his predecessors in part for his inability to leave his birthplace. Although they haunt him, his grandfathers "induce[] a sort of home-feeling with the past" (11). His decision to accept responsibility for

his ancestors' actions, as well as to accept any curse they carry, is recognition of a familial responsibility and a connection to their town. Although the Puritans are one reason why he can relate to someone such as Hester and can therefore write *The Scarlet Letter*, the ancestral connection that provides him with some literary fodder also imprisons him within his town.

Hawthorne becomes more renowned due to his relative's work in founding Salem, but his devotion to his precursors further harms his writing by placing him in the very Custom-House that deteriorates his creativity. In an attempt to remain loyal to these old men, Hawthorne accepts the criticism he supposes his ancestors would put against him for pursuing a career in literature:

No aim that I have ever cherished would they [my ancestors] recognize as laudable; no success of mine—if my life, beyond its domestic scope, had ever been brightened by success—would they deem otherwise than worthless, if not positively disgraceful. (“The Custom-House” 12)

As he expects that one progenitor would admonish him for not pursuing a career that would “glorify[] God, or be[] serviceable to mankind in his day and generation,” Hawthorne believes he must take on work that has more utility for his community.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Hawthorne

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<sup>8</sup> I want to specify that, in real life, the author did not accept the Custom-House position due to the imaginary requests of his deceased grandfathers, but because he needed to supplement the insufficient pay he received as an author with governmental work (Gollin 2171, 2172). Furthermore, as concerns the imaginary Hawthorne, the argument could be made that he considers his accomplishments important, even if his ancestors do not feel the same. As a result, he would have no need to worry about what his ancestors have to say about his literary achievements and would not take the Custom-House job due to ancestral guilt. In the preface, however, Hawthorne does not represent his literary accomplishments as noteworthy, for he refers to himself as “a writer of tolerably poor tales and essays” (30). His fame relies on his family, particularly because, as he goes on to note, no descendants from William and John Hathorne have accomplished anything remarkable, literary or not, in Salem: “Planted deep, in the town’s earliest infancy and childhood, by these two earnest and energetic men, the race has ever since subsisted here [...] but seldom or never, on the other hand, after the first two generations, performing any memorable deed, or so much as putting forward a claim to public notice” (“The Custom-House” 12).

This problem of living in the shadow of more noteworthy ancestors arises again in *The House of the Seven Gables*. The ancestor in the work, the Colonel Pyncheon, is another notorious Puritan judge in New England. Whereas his sternness, as well as amazing death, earn him fame in the unnamed community of the book, his descendents fall into near-anonymity, recognized only because they are descendent of the remembered Colonel. In particular, one descendent, Hepzibah Pyncheon, possessing none of her family’s previous wealth, has to

continues to work at the Custom-House because his family has maintained such a connection with the town. He describes his ancestral relationship to Salem as “not love but instinct,” a “long connection of a family with one spot [...] quite independent of any charm in the scenery or moral circumstances that surround him” (12). Despite his misery in this locale, Hawthorne takes the Custom-House position due to this unsentimental instinct to remain in Salem simply because his ancestors founded the community: “[I]t was chiefly this strange, indolent, unjoyous attachment for my native town, that brought me to fill a place in Uncle Sam’s brick edifice. My doom was on me” (13). If not for the “long connection of a family” to this uninteresting location, Hawthorne would not feel any reason to work at the Custom-House; yet, because of his forerunners, he toils in a deadening workplace.

If Hawthorne feels ambivalent about abandoning his neighborhood, then the best solution for his problems would seem to be a more moderate one. Critics, debating Hawthorne’s feelings about home and travel, generally choose one or the other rather than, as I would, considering how the author may rely on both. For example, Eakin asserts that Hawthorne can regain his imagination only by separating himself from other people, as his “imagination [will] not work” (356) unless he recognizes “the paramount necessity of aesthetic distance” from his subject matter (358). The factor Eakin does not consider, however, is what problem Hawthorne may encounter by separating himself from his neighbors. Although writing requires the author to remain alone in order to contemplate how he will organize his story, Hawthorne also needs to immerse himself in social life order to study how people behave and anticipate how they would react in hypothetical situations,

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convert the family domicile into a cent-shop. I will return to *The House of the Seven Gables* at the conclusion to this thesis, as its themes of ancestry, home, and travel relate very well to *The Scarlet Letter*.

thereby allowing him to write believable characters. As Annette Baxter argues, isolation will deprive Hawthorne of the real world that provides a basis and inspiration for his literature:

Total absorption in the processes of creation meant a loosening of the ties binding him to the mass of humanity” (Baxter 226), which can, “[a]t its worst, [...] culminate[] not simply in the obscurity [...] but in a deadening of interest in the common concerns of man. (229)

By making himself unsympathetic towards the concerns of other people, Hawthorne cannot create art that will connect emotionally with his reader; the artist requires not distance but involvement with his community. Where I diverge from Baxter, however, concerns the problem with Hawthorne’s full integration into the mass of humanity, which can become just as problematic as complete isolation.

The answer to this dilemma is to combine Eakin and Baxter’s arguments into one answer: Hawthorne should maintain the minimal detachment needed for his art. Charles R. O’Donnell, synthesizing Eakin and Baxter’s ideas, asserts, as I do, that Hawthorne comes upon the balance between fellowship and isolation through his literature. The task for Hawthorne, as an artist, is to balance seclusion and participation, to determine a way in which he can avoid the overwhelming influence the world can have on his work while ensuring he does not become an automaton. Although to “straddle the gap,” for people to divide their time between the community and themselves, is “betray[al]” against the interests of the self and one’s responsibilities of the community (318), O’Donnell thinks that writing becomes Hawthorne’s way to combine the contemplative benefits of separation with emotional camaraderie, a process realized only through his literature: “He finds integration with the community of man through his books” (332).

Although I agree with O'Donnell that literature is the process by which Hawthorne finds the balance between the integration and separation, my interpretation differs from his on two key points. The first disagreement I have with O'Donnell concerns how he thinks Hawthorne engages in both isolation and domesticity. Although coming closer than other critics to tackling how Hawthorne receives the benefits of both citizenship and journeying and uses one to counteract the deficiencies of the other, he does not directly argue that Hawthorne's movement between these two ideas is a form of travel. In "The Custom-House," Hawthorne writes that it is advantageous to transfer to an unfamiliar setting, to "strike [one's] roots into unaccustomed earth" (13), but to do so with literature that will transplant the mind into another location while the body remains close to home. An additional counter-argument I raise against O'Donnell's argument is that Hawthorne, by assimilating into his surroundings, may remain forever in his neighborhood and never earn his own fame aside from that of being a descendant of the Hawthorne family. Emily Miller Budick suggests Hawthorne is fated to remain in Salem, to be "the child who stays" (176), which means he never leaves the town and never travels, whether through physical movement or his own literature. Rather than suggest that he will find fame in another town or that literature is an escape for the author, Budick claims Hawthorne's popularity relies on his ancestors' name-recognition. Furthermore, his stories rely heavily on his relatives, so his writing does not take him away from New England but keeps him connected to his home. As Budick argues, "Without his Puritan ancestors there literally can be no Hawthorne" (181). I conclude that citizenship is rigid and inescapable, which challenges the idea that Hawthorne can be a citizen of somewhere else if he must encounter such firm boundaries around his town, or even his entire nation.

Budick makes an important point that Hawthorne relies on his hometown for much of his literature; only a few of his works, such as *The Marble Faun*, take place outside of New England.<sup>9</sup> Her point, however, is that she thinks America is something physical, a set of boundaries within which Hawthorne must remain or against which he must overcome. Budick's argument ignores Hawthorne's discussion in "The Custom-House" of the immateriality of Salem, a characterization of his home that Gillian Brown emphasizes. In contrast to Budick, Brown claims that Hawthorne characterizes the idea of "America" as only a construct, not a tangible place but a nation composed of conceptual borders. Granted, the nation, although the result of intangible notions, has very real ramifications for people, as Hawthorne can attest based on his expulsion from the Custom-House by the incoming president. The author, however, maintains that a person is not limited by the assumptions of what constitutes a home:

While the nation certainly affects its citizens, and especially seems to preoccupy Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne significantly presents the nation – and critical accounts of it – as part of people's imaginative and actual lives, not as the determinant of them. (Brown 141-142)

The re-conception of America as one of many "imagined objects" is "an imaginative opportunity" (Brown 134), allowing a person to alter the national boundaries. Although she does not specifically refer to itinerancy, Brown's contention strengthens my claim; what

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<sup>9</sup> Hawthorne also writes works not only about other nations but while he is in Europe, which contradicts some of Budick's claim. The preface to *The Marble Faun*, in particular, offers what Hawthorne sees as the problem with his nation's literature, as well as why he would prefer to look to Europe rather than his Puritan ancestors. Whereas "Italy [...] was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct," in other words, a more imaginative locale, "where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon" (3), the United States lacks this similar "mystery" and "picturesque and gloomy wrong," such that "[i]t will be very long, [he] trust[s], before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes," whether in literature or in "our individual lives" (3). He admits, however, that the United States relies on a more stable attitude, in which actualities "are, and must needs be," insisted upon (*Marble Faun* 3). Nevertheless, Hawthorne criticizes his birthplace for refusing to, as he writes in *The House of the Seven Gables*, "mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture" (3), to reinterpret actual surroundings as something slightly dissimilar. Hawthorne, as Budick notes, is dependent on America, yet he wants to make the nation appear different, not as his "dear native land" but as a new location.



defines America, and hence Hawthorne's home, is an abstraction, which allows him to rework the notion of the journey. If nations are imaginary, then literature can rework national perimeters, making the trek less about physical movement than re-conception. By framing nations as theoretical rather than actual, literature becomes a suitable mode of travel for Hawthorne. The boundaries that demarcate his town are fluid, for he can describe both the Custom-House and Salem as "dream[s] [...], as if [they] were no portion of the real earth, but an overgrown village in cloud-land" ("The Custom-House" 35). He may drift into areas of arbitrary borders while still referring to himself as a citizen of somewhere else, as a person who establishes residency in some place; he has a domicile at the same time he moves away from it. The mystery of the location, that romantic quality of his home, remains uncertain and creative; his ability to be a citizen of any place is like traveling across various scenes.

As Hawthorne concludes in "The Custom-House," he hopes his literature will bring him fame, so that children in later generations will regard "kindly the scribbler of bygone days," and he maintains that expectation because such an experience would be a "*transporting* and triumphant thought" (35; emphasis added). By remaining both at home and away, he will continue to be "transported" by his ideas through many locations while keeping his roots firmly placed into accustomed earth. As Hawthorne notes, "The life of the Custom-House lies like a dream behind me," and, "[s]oon, likewise, my old native town will loom upon me through the haze of memory, a mist brooding over and around it me" (35). In the process of writing this preface, he learns that, although Salem will be like a dream, he can wake up when necessary and reengage with his neighbors at any time. Although he mistakenly thought that "it lay at [his] own option to recall whatever was valuable in the past," that he could temporarily suspend his literary skills while prolonging his tenure at the

boring Custom-House (22), Hawthorne completes his preface with the notion that he can have Salem fall into obscurity. Whereas he underestimated the fragility of his creative abilities, Hawthorne's idea of wandering through his writing suggests that he finds a way for Salem to fade. By giving utility to his literature, making it a means of transport, he contradicts his elders' argument that his work is a waste of his talents; instead, his creativity allows him to gain fame and to "travel" away from his community and thus respect his ancestors' wishes that he perform work of value. Most importantly, however, Hawthorne has found a way to remain in Salem while venturing to another location through his text. When the narrator of "The Custom-House" proceeds to write *The Scarlet Letter* in order to continue that process of journeying, he also finds a character whose actions provide an example of the kind of a trek that results from staying inside one's neighborhood. In the next two chapters, I will consider how Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* becomes a citizen of many different settings within Boston, as she wanders between them. From her example, Hawthorne illustrates how he himself is able to be distant from Salem without ever leaving it—to be, like Pearl, a traveler within his home.

### Chapter 3: Travel inside home: Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the child Pearl Prynne is both a scapegoat ostracized by the people of Boston and a participant in the same Puritan society, somehow living between, or perhaps "traveling" between, the interior of the community and everything outside the town's borders, physical or imaginary. Local leaders, including Governor Richard Bellingham and Reverend John Wilson, mark Pearl's mother, Hester Prynne, with the scarlet "A." Feeling discomfort because she is marked by a symbol signifying the sin of adultery that leads to the birth of her daughter, Hester takes Pearl with her away from Boston in order to create a new home in the neighboring forest. Pearl, due to her association with her mother, becomes an exile in the community, a status exacerbated by her illegitimate birth. Townspeople reproach Pearl for being a bastard child, with some individuals even hypothesizing that her capricious behavior originates from her rumored father, Satan. At the same time, however, Bellingham and Wilson characterize Pearl as the personification of her mother's sin, a figure capable of providing Hester with punishment and redemption. Pearl, while an outcast, nevertheless has a role within her community, namely to improve Hester, so that, although she is banished from Boston, hence residing beyond the laws of Puritanism, she is also incorporated into the town in order to function in the very system that rejects her. Because she remains a recluse, however, Boston cannot confine Pearl, as she instead can exist in multiple locations or with people of various cultures and morals; independent of any one social circle, she can perform in many.

Pearl's ability to live in numerous settings during her childhood is one reason why she is able to leave her hometown at the end of the story. Hawthorne does not specify in which nation Pearl settles as an adult, only telling the reader that she is somewhere in Europe.

The vagueness of her position allows the reader to interpret her as living in one of numerous places, simultaneously existing in all countries, a resident of Europe at large as opposed to any one part of it. Similarly, in preparation for this departure, Pearl's childhood in the New World consists of her inhabitation of several settings, though not because of any unclear description about her location; Hawthorne specifies that the story takes place in Boston. Rather, her occupation in numerous areas results because she adjusts to an assortment of dwellings: She can visit Boston, stay in the outdoors, or relate to the local Native Americans. The fluctuating movement between the town and the thicket, the Euro-American Puritan culture and all else separate from it, makes Pearl, in a sense, a traveler through the separate parts of New England, as she explores the assorted "nations" or "countries" within her place of residency. With her ability to remain at home while touring the region, Pearl is Hawthorne's model traveler, an example for how his readers can leave their birthplaces while retaining their connections with those lands. Pearl's exploits in America, placing her into difficult environments with people with whom she must learn to cooperate, set her up as someone on a journey before she immigrates to Europe, suggesting that Hawthorne develops her into a traveler starting in the earliest chapters of *The Scarlet Letter*. Travel, therefore, is a theme throughout the romance, not only when Pearl leaves Boston but also when she is still living in New England. The progression of Pearl's outings prepares her for the final departure from the New World while preparing the reader to accept her decision to leave; she has acted as a traveler throughout the entire story. Focusing on her expedition into the neighboring forest and her interactions with the Native Americans, as well as her ongoing relationship with the town of Boston, I will explore how numerous locales test her ability to survive and adapt in a manner like that of an experienced traveler.

Although almost everyone in Hawthorne's romance is on a journey, as the Puritan community emigrates from England in order to settle in Boston, Pearl is a unique character because her complicated citizenship allows her to adapt to new spaces during her excursions. In contrast, the three main adult characters in the story, traveling from the Old World to the New World, remain confined to only one nation at any one time, too well integrated into Salem to escape it permanently. Dimmesdale, for example, refutes Hester's exhortations that he "leave it all behind thee" (Chapter XVII: 127) because he lacks the hardiness necessary for such departures and likely will "lie down again on these leaves" and "sink down there, and die at once" (Chapter XVII: 126). Hester, although departing from Boston, ultimately returns because, according to the narrator, her bond with the town is too strong, for it is the setting for the sin she committed with Dimmesdale and, hence, is the location for her redemption: "Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence" (Chapter XXIV: 165). Chillingworth, much like Dimmesdale, sees himself as having a role to fulfill in Boston, namely to torment the minister who made him a cuckold.<sup>10</sup> When the reverend confesses his sin to everyone in the public square, however, the old doctor, without a purpose to life, must die, as he "shrivelled away, and almost vanished from mortal sight, like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun" (Chapter XXIV: 163-4). The quote links social role and physical health as they relate to Chillingworth's confinement to America. When he loses his task as Dimmesdale's nemesis, his health also departs; without either a function in the community or the stamina necessary to continue living, his death approaches

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, when considering how Dimmesdale and Chillingworth feel they have some duty in the town, although a perverted one in the case of the latter, they behave much like Hawthorne in "The Custom-House," as he feels an ancestral responsibility to accept a job that is not enjoyable but gives utility to Salem. The two characters, therefore, may be examples of what Hawthorne sees as the fault of being too involved with one's work. Focusing on one's job to the point of ignoring other responsibilities keeps the person too well connected to the limitations of one's home, no matter how pious the job is, as in the case of Dimmesdale's ministry, or how personal it is, as in the case of Chillingworth's vengeance.

and, unable to escape America in time, he must die inside the continent. As Hawthorne warns in “The Custom-House,” “frequent transplantation is perhaps better for the stock” (11), but Chillingworth’s confinement to his role in Boston too long leaves him as the uprooted weed, with a weakened body and a departing spirit.

Pearl, in contrast to the other main characters, is alive at the end of the story and thus may leave the town. She can separate herself from the American colonists who denigrate her as an illegitimate child rather than remaining trapped within such a constraining environment. Strong connections to Boston and physical infirmities keep the three adult characters imprisoned in the New World, and, as a result, Pearl’s escape requires both personal distance from her community and greater vigor; her exile into the forest satisfies both needs. The Puritan leaders indirectly place Pearl into the woods when they punish her mother with a peer pressure that makes life in Boston too difficult to withstand. The penalty actually benefits Pearl, however, as living in the outdoors disrupts her connections to the town and prevents her from developing an excessive attachment to the town that would hamper her itinerancy. Pearl’s abode in the forest also forces her to survive in a location with ferocious animals, which improves her hardiness in order to survive the upcoming transatlantic voyage.

Because her journey engenders risks, Hawthorne toughens Pearl for her future life in Europe by having her tour the wilderness of North America. Green argues that references to the metaphorical forests in “The Custom-House” function as experience leading to enlightenment, but a similar process occurs for Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* with actual forests. Like Hawthorne in Salem, she develops the resilience necessary for her expedition by spending time in a truly grim woodland, which the author characterizes as dark and harsh, “the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region” (Chapter

XVIII: 129). Although tranquility and calmness are possible in the outdoors, such as when “a gleam of flickering sunshine might now and then be seen” (Chapter XVI: 118-119), the narrator suggests happiness is nearly impossible, for this “flitting cheerfulness [is] always at the further extremity of some long vista through the forest,” “withdr[awing] itself” just as easily as it can appear (Chapter XVI: 118-119). Nevertheless, Pearl has no difficulty basking in the light, as she “actually catch[es] the sunshine, and [stands] laughing in the midst of it” (Chapter XVI: 119) because she adjusts to her environment, fashioning nature to her desires and making the grove, “[s]ombre as it [is],” her “playmate” (Chapter XVIII: 131). Her adaptability results from what Hawthorne terms as her innate primality, “a kindred wildness in the human child” as recognized by “the mother-forest, and these wild things” who “hardly [take] pains to move out of her path” and instead allow her to approach them (Chapter XVIII: 131). Pearl may surprise Bostonians with her behavior, but, in the forest, the creatures recognize that she is unlike other humans. In choosing to have the girl survive in a harsh place like the timberland, Hawthorne suggests she can change when necessary in order to handle whatever difficulties will arise. Pearl, undomesticated and untamed, possesses a darkness necessary to mimic the outdoors as well as to connect to it; just as Hawthorne claims the woods are a shadowy realm, he insists that Pearl “ha[s] enough of shadow in her own little life” (Chapter XVI: 121).<sup>11</sup> She is a child of nature.<sup>12</sup> The woods

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<sup>11</sup> Hawthorne also links the dark forest to Pearl’s mother, Hester, as his narrator questions why she remains in Boston when she has “the passes of the dark, inscrutable forest open to her” (Chapter V: 56). Pearl’s affinity for the obscure wilderness therefore results from her heredity as well as from an adaptation she makes to her environment outside of civilization; she somehow combines her complex nationality with her skills at acclimatization.

<sup>12</sup> Hawthorne frequently describes Pearl as a child of nature. In the chapter, “The Procession,” a sailor sees Pearl as “a flake of the sea-foam[ , which] had taken the shape of a little maid, [ . . . ] a soul of the sea-fire, that flashes beneath the prow in the night-time.” Such a comparison further suggests Pearl operates as the adaptive traveler, able to be like the forests on the land or seen as a sea creature to “a group of mariners, the swarthy-cheeked wild men of the ocean” (Chapter XXII: 155).

are “wild,” “free,” and “lawless” (Chapter XVIII: 129), and such words are as suitable for describing Pearl, a lively child whose unknown parentage makes her free from the laws of Puritanism.

Similar to her gift for bonding with the natural elements as if they are “playmates” and as if she speaks with them due to a shared naturalness is Pearl’s association with people from multiple cultures, including local Native Americans. Pearl would be familiar with these people due to their frequent trips to Boston, as Hawthorne notes: “[T]he red men were not so infrequent visitors of the English settlements that one of them would have attracted any notice” (Chapter III: 44). Pearl even approaches one of them in “The New England Holiday,” suggesting she forms a bond with this person because she presents herself before the man as someone who wants to relate with him: “She ran and looked the wild Indian in the face” (Chapter XXII: 155). Her stare is potentially harmful, perhaps a gaze in order to watch and study such a person, to conquer him. Pearl’s action, however, requires consideration because it is not controlling in the sense that other characters in *The Scarlet Letter* try to control the Native Americans. Although Hawthorne describes the man as feeling discomfort at being stared at by this child, Pearl does not engage in the type of control that Dimmesdale and Chillingworth employ. The minister, for example, seeks only to bring them into his congregation, as he “[goes] [...] to visit the Apostle Eliot, among his Indian converts” (Chapter XVI: 118), to see what progress the other minister has made in converting the Native Americans to Puritanism. Chillingworth, as well, maintains a long correspondence with them due to his imprisonment, even learning the Native Americans’ medicines. His relationship with these people, however, takes the form of bartering rather than the personal kinship Pearl has with them, as Chillingworth bargains for the medicine “in



requital of some lessons of [his] own” (Chapter IV: 52). Pearl does not treat the Native Americans in a manner similar to these two Europeans; in fact, she is in some ways more similar to the indigenous people than she is to Dimmesdale and Chillingworth. When greeting one Native American with a stare, “he [grows] conscious of a nature wilder than his own” (Chapter XXII: 155). Although her gaze at the man initially suggests Pearl overpowers him, she possesses a childish innocence that negates the kind of authority held by Dimmesdale and Chillingworth over the Native Americans. Hawthorne admits Pearl has a “native audacity,” but, rather than appearing as a conqueror, she is “still with a reserve,” appearing with an “indescribable charm of beauty and eccentricity” (Chapter XXII: 155). Her intermingling of strangeness and innocence gives the Native American some discomfort but not a feeling of oppression. Furthermore, the similarity between Pearl and the Native Americans allows her to prove she can move unrestrictedly. Just as this “wild Indian in his woods” may “roam[] [...] freely” (Chapter XVIII: 128), so does Pearl wander from Boston to the outdoors regardless of physical separation between the forest and the town or cultural divisions between the tribe and the colony.

While her relations with the Native Americans suggest that Pearl is extroverted, Chester E. Eisinger argues that Pearl is not as outgoing as the examples suggest but is actually anti-social, incapable of fitting into her community and, as a result, exiled into the woods. I disagree with his argument on two points. First, according to Eisinger, only when Dimmesdale dies does Pearl learn how to operate in the town, but his argument ignores moments from the story in which, long before her father’s death, she is adapting to her surroundings by engaging with other people, particularly Dimmesdale. At times, Pearl is quite amicable to her father, such as when she caresses his hand in “The Elf-Child and the

Minister” or, as only a baby, when she gives a “half pleased, half plaintive murmur” as she “[holds] up [her] little arms” to this minister (Chapter III: 49). Second, although Pearl may not suit any one place fully, as she must remain malleable in order to adjust to numerous locations, there are nevertheless moments in *The Scarlet Letter* in which she at least functions within the society because of the very distance she has from it. T. Walter Herbert, Jr., argues that the town leaders give Pearl the task of punishing Hester; however, her reckless persona that willingly rebukes her mother arises only because she is outside the rules of Puritan Boston, which would refute such disrespectful behavior towards her mother. Pearl is both outcast and participant because she is both a disciplinarian and a savior, in what Herbert refers to as the girl’s “internal contradictions” (289). Hester herself says, “Pearl punishes me,” functioning as the mother’s “torture” in the same manner that the “A” on her dress rebukes her for sin. She even states that the child “is the scarlet letter” itself, personified (Chapter VIII: 76). By calling Pearl the letter itself, Hester recognizes that her daughter fulfills the role of castigator in a manner similar to the scarlet letter, that “a mark of shame upon her bosom” (Chapter III: 46), which, whether in the form of a child or an embroidered “A,” compels her always to feel disgrace for her sin.

Aside from functioning as a punishment for her mother’s sins, however, Pearl is also a redeemer, which allows both the daughter and Hester to maintain relationships with Boston and everything separate from it, to remain connected to their homes while traveling away from them. Pearl exists in order to remind her mother of the affair with Dimmesdale, which prompts Hester to consider her link to this preeminent member of Boston, which in turn reinforces the link Hester has to the community itself. As a result, Pearl’s outsider status, as merely a traveler to Boston, allows her to have a kind of residency in the town; she is

employed by Wilson and Bellingham in order to improve Hester. Pearl, therefore, is both an outsider and a resident, and Boston is both a travel destination and her home. Furthermore, she encourages her mother to find a similar balance between her desire to avoid the Puritans and to interact with them. Pearl keeps her mother in contact with Boston, as well as with the responsibilities she has to the town; if Hester chooses to participate with the people, as she must in order to convince Wilson and Bellingham to return Pearl to her, then she must adhere to the laws, as well as the admonishment, of that community. Herbert suggests Pearl tries to correct the conduct of her mother, and hence rescue her from her inappropriate actions, by behaving as “an agent of Hester’s punishment” through “persistent allusions to [the scarlet letter], and her eerily apt questions to Hester about Arthur [Dimmesdale]” (289). Robert Emmet Whelan agrees with Herbert, positing that “until Hester’s love for the minister has been disciplined to recognize and obey the will of God[,] [...] Pearl’s affections must remain ‘acid and disagreeable’” (492). When Hester understands the need to follow the rules of her Puritan neighbors, then Pearl will stop being difficult to her mother.

Regardless of Eisinger’s assertion that the girl is not a participant in Boston until her father’s death, Pearl behaves as a member of the community, implementing much of the work the town leaders intend to perform on Hester. Although town leaders such as Bellingham and Wilson are concerned that Pearl is irreligious, based on her heretic exclamation that she “[has] no Heavenly Father!” (Chapter VI: 67), and even threaten to separate the girl from her mother, they do not carry out the plan. Instead, Bellingham and Wilson ignore their own rules, in much the same manner that Pearl ignores the Puritans’ laws. In other words, Pearl’s temperament is undesirable but highly effective in chastising and redeeming Hester; Bellingham and Wilson can punish and correct the woman without having

to enforce the penalty themselves. Initially concerned with Pearl's well-being, the town officials decide once again to focus on Hester's education and punishment. Wilson and Bellingham, although troubled by Pearl's anti-social conduct, nevertheless validate her role as a member of the community, contrary to Eisinger's claim. The Puritans endorse such punitive behavior, although it contradicts the emphasis they place on involvement with the town; the approval of Wilson and Bellingham provides Pearl with a purpose to serve Boston, which makes her a part of the town as much as she is outside it.

Because Pearl is not bound by the rules of any one location, she has the potential to act for many places at once. In fact, she can represent entire continents, demonstrated in her ability to be an American and a European. Independent of the rules of Puritanism, the girl remains a part of Boston by operating as a means of deliverance to not only Hester but also entire groups of people. She can reconcile the conflicts between two continents due to her complex character, her capacity to be "all things to all men" (Garlitz 690). Pearl's critical history has allowed for countless interpretations, in a sense operating as what F. O. Matthiessen calls Hawthorne's "device of multiple-choice" (276) and what Bercovitch describes as the readers' need to "choose as many parts as possible of the truth and/or as many truths as [readers] can possibly find in the symbol" (19). Hawthorne, by making the symbol that is Pearl so complex, allows her to represent not just America but also Europe. Rather than isolating the New World from the Old World, she is both an American by birth and a resident of Europe by choice. Pearl is a traveler, as her identity fluctuates between the two spots, reminding characters and critics of either nationality. "[I]n this one child there were many children" (Chapter VI: 62).

In contrast to my contention, Pearl's otherworldliness and operation as an artistic symbol, even as art itself, leads some critics to describe her as only European and not as American. In the story itself, Wilson sees the girl as a throwback to "the old land," "one of those naughty elves or fairies whom [the Puritans] thought to have left behind" (Chapter VIII: 74). Millicent Davitt Bell notices that Hawthorne repeatedly links Pearl to Europe, which, "with all due emphasis on the word 'home,' [implies] that Pearl is not at home in Boston" and must leave the New World (158). Newberry expands on Bell's point: "In his treatment of Pearl, Hawthorne depicts other Old World survivals in early America," as she is "the symbol of that art [from Europe]," that "luxuriant Renaissance-style artistry" of her mother. Pearl's ancestry, however, is "a potential artistic heritage not yet acceptable in America" (177; 172; 181), hence requiring the girl's removal from such an artistically stifling location.<sup>13</sup>

The narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* and critics, however, just as easily appropriate Pearl as the symbol of the New World. The narrator considers her to be American, referring to her as "the richest heiress of her day in the New World" (Chapter XXIV: 164), and Nina Baym writes that Pearl's ability to leave Boston is appropriate for "the American dream" but only as an "ironic reversing" of that dream, as her destination is to Europe instead and not to another part of America (299). With this sentence, Baym, subconsciously or not, suggests that Pearl is both an embodiment of the American dream, and also a citizen of Europe—in other words, an amalgamation of both continents. Baym seems closest to my argument, in that she characterizes Pearl as having a type of dual citizenship to both continents. The other critics, however, attempt to put Pearl into only one continent, to make her either American or

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<sup>13</sup> As noted in Chapter 1, and as will be noted in Chapter 4, Hawthorne and Pearl are both artists hindered by their uncreative surroundings.

European, when she actually is both. Bethany Reid raises a contradicting point, as she indicates that Pearl's inability for much of *The Scarlet Letter* to find her "fatherland," both a home in America and the identity of her father, is an indication that she "is no longer part of the American democratic project" (262). I want to propose, however, that the character never loses her variability; her wanderings within her home, as well as her indeterminate place in Europe, are instances of constant change, not a "los[s of] her attractive mutability." Because she still adjusts, she is still "part of [Reid's idea of] the American democratic project," only in a different way. Rather than existing as only European or only American or as banished from either nationality or trapped between the two, Pearl can simultaneously have both nationalities. She can remain in Boston and journey abroad. The final chapter confirms she is a traveler, as she leaves for Europe, but the movement between the Old World and the New World, rather than suggesting Pearl is giving up America for Europe, actually suggests she maintains some tie to both, not limiting herself to either site but living as "a woman in [the world]" (Chapter XXIII: 162).

Whatever her new function is as a woman in the world, Pearl is still similar to the United States. Both the nation and the child are young and creating their own identities amidst the interactions of people from numerous cultures; consider how Boston is capable of hosting such a multicultural festival as the one at the end of the story that gathers Puritans, European sailors, and Native Americans in one area. Despite owing their existence in part to European settlers, both Pearl and, at least at this point in time, America are separated from much of the outside world. They must devote this young phase of their lives towards finding a way for an unstable colony to survive despite the harsh wilderness and to determine how to relate with people of various backgrounds. At a certain stage in their development, when the

colony becomes a nation and the girl becomes a woman, both the United States and Pearl can look to Europe, either as a source of affirmation or as an example of what they are not. Either the Old World reminds the nation and the girl of an ancestry shared with numerous countries across the Atlantic, or Europe becomes something different, a place whose contrast motivates both the people of the United States and Pearl to be more like Europe or to avoid becoming it. Whatever decision the people and the woman make, both are maturing, a process of becoming more sophisticated as reflected in contemporary literary developments. After all, even in the nineteenth century, Hawthorne and his fellow American authors are trying to determine what their literary voice will be.<sup>14</sup> As Pearl travels within and away from the New World, her movement suggests the United States is still tracing its own identity and its own boundaries. Similarly, as Hawthorne determines what path he wants to take in “The Custom-House” and how his literature will function, he is uncovering something new. For the concluding chapter, I will consider how Pearl serves as a model traveler for Hawthorne, demonstrating how his concept of the Romance as a form of travel also functions as Pearl’s process of traveling within her home. American romanticism, as a result, becomes a process of traveling within home.

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<sup>14</sup> In *Divided Loyalties*, Newberry looks at Euro-American relationships in terms of both inspiration and opposition. Hawthorne, through evidence uncovered by the *British* surveyor Pue, writes a story about an American woman but through the perspective of foreign sources. Newberry argues that, because Hawthorne’s character in “The Custom-House” draws from English sources and refers to Pue as his adopted ancestor, the author “all[ies] himself with an English ancestry whose aesthetic and spiritual traditions are pitted against those of his Puritan forebears” (168). Other critics note that Hawthorne’s interest in English sources does not minimize the influence of his New England ancestors, and Budick goes so far as to argue that the author would not have his romance without the Puritans. In any case, the situation balances both national influences, which somewhat relates to the conclusion I will make: Hawthorne has to balance his home in America against whatever travel he intends to pursue, in Europe or otherwise.

#### Chapter 4: The creative moderation of home and travel in “The Custom-House” and *The Scarlet Letter*

In “The Custom-House,” home induces guilt from the past, inhibiting progress and artistic achievement. In an attempt to behave as his ancestors expect, to perform some task that contributes to his community, Hawthorne finds himself too well integrated into Salem’s dull environment, and his creativity and literary success both suffer. The author, in order to prevent his hometown from harming his children’s potential and from impairing his own writing, decides to leave his neighborhood. After reading *The Scarlet Letter*, however, Hawthorne’s ideas about residency and travel become clearer. Pearl also contends with the expectations of her elders, attempting to live both as an exile, as the Puritan town leaders condemn her, and a participant in Salem, as the Puritan town leaders give her the civic function of punishing her mother’s crime. Despite the hectic fluctuation of her identity, from outsider to insider, Pearl learns how to be both a part of Boston and separate from it—to be almost nomadic. Her travel-within-home allows Pearl to prepare for her eventual voyage and life in Europe, yet she remains in contact with Hester. Like Hawthorne, Pearl obtains distance from her suffocating environment and reconciles her frustrations about the community with her responsibilities to her family, a solution arising from the balance of itinerancy and home-life.

In the introduction, I argued that travel is a constant theme in *The Scarlet Letter*, as both Hawthorne and Pearl end their stories by leaving their birthplaces forever. With Pearl’s departure, however, the theme changes; the story becomes one not simply of itinerancy but of a particular form of movement involving imagination. Like Hawthorne, who must remain in Salem although his mind wanders to other imaginary places, Pearl must first make her town



unfamiliar before forever leaving it. The final description of Pearl's life functions as a conclusion to "The Custom-House" and Hawthorne's dreams of abandoning Salem by demonstrating how the journey acts against stagnation of the creative mind. The link between the introduction and *The Scarlet Letter* indicates what Hawthorne looks for in his writing, what he considers to be appropriate American literature and the suitable romance. How does Pearl's travel-within-home correspond to Hawthorne's concept of the romance? Based on the author's later writings, the girl's re-interpretation of her familiar surroundings as more imaginative settings is Hawthorne's very definition of the American romance. The conflict between excursions and residency is a theme that appears in another of Hawthorne's works, largely because the conflict gives rise to the genre of literature he is writing, but I primarily want to consider what results from his intent to leave, especially as his inclinations arise alongside the creation of a model traveler such as Pearl.

Although Hawthorne and Pearl's methods of traveling within the community vary, both "The Custom-House" and *The Scarlet Letter* make similar arguments about itinerancy and home. Hawthorne relies on literature in order to remove himself from his neighborhood by writing about situations separate from his life and acting vicariously through his characters. His decision to be "a citizen of somewhere else" relies on his ability to immerse himself in his work, taking him to the point that he is able to carry on discussions with ghosts, feel the heat of Hester's "A" on his chest, and imagines his characters speak to him or, rather, mock him. In order to write such tales, however, Hawthorne does derive his imaginative alternatives from his surroundings and the history of his town, including characters from New England history and punishments that correspond to Hester's wearing of the scarlet

letter.<sup>15</sup> Pearl also uses her reality in order to exercise her creative ambitions, but, whereas Hawthorne writes about novel situations based on real events, she changes her actual surroundings into a new existence, an imaginary playground. Although she remains in Boston for much of her life, her interactions with the sectors of her community—the town, the forest, the Native Americans and the European sailors—involve approaching each experience as a new opportunity for play. While watching the interactions of diverse people at the Boston festival, she imagine the scene to be “a play-day for the whole world” (Chapter XXI: 145), an opportunity for a varied community to exist in one location. Her play-day, however, is also the process of deriving something imaginative or new from the seemingly unchanging actuality. For example, rather than simply argue that her mother gave birth to her, or that God created her, Pearl imagines that her conception consisted simply of Hester plucking her off of a bush as if the girl were a rose (Chapter VIII: 75). In another instance, she recognizes Dimmesdale as the “sad, strange man” from the scaffold, the same person who holds Hester’s hand in the forest and “kisses [Pearl’s] forehead, too, so that the little brook would hardly wash it off” (Chapter XXI: 146). Shortly after making such comments, however, the little girl can forget such memories and view the minister as someone new (Chapter XXII: 152). Through the process of changing the commonplace into the

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<sup>15</sup> Aside from including the governor John Bellingham, the reverend John Wilson, and the alleged witch Ann Hibbins, Hawthorne also references actual punishments and crimes that took place in Puritan New England, as well as similar cases in seventeenth-century England. Charles Ryskamp, reading the laws of seventeenth-century Boston, finds that Felt’s *Annals of Salem* lists adultery as punishable by “forever after wear[ing] a capital A, two inches long, cut out of cloth colored differently from [the punished’s] clothes,” although this treatment followed whippings in the gallows (302). In order to determine the basis for Hester’s scarlet “A,” Mukhtar Ali Isani offers a transatlantic example by looking at another Prynne, William from the year 1637 who, for criticizing both the monarchy and the Anglican Church, received a branding on his cheeks, the letters “S.L.,” not “scarlet letter” but “seditious libeler.” In another example from England, Alfred S. Reid suggests that Hawthorne derives the elements of adultery and the illegitimate child from the Thomas Overbury murder in 1615. Not only does Hawthorne reference the story twice in *The Scarlet Letter*, but Reid also determines that an illegitimate baby born to one of Overbury’s murderers, a child who receives an inheritance from an old man and becomes exiled to another nation, serves as the basis for Pearl.

extraordinary, she determines how to re-shape creatively her world as a more interesting place, a new experience she can repeat with infinite interpretations.

Despite the different media employed by each author—Hawthorne and his paper, Pearl and her world—the girl’s ability to make the familiar unfamiliar is the very lesson Hawthorne takes from Pearl’s example. In “The Custom-House,” Hawthorne approaches his surroundings as if they are astonishing and fantastic. When he encounters the moonlit room of the Old Manse, for example, everything appears different: “[W]hatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though still almost as vividly present as by daylight” (29). Just as Pearl fabricates the division between nature and the town, resulting in corresponding changes in her relationship with Dimmesdale, either to wash his kisses away in the former or to welcome his attention in the latter, Hawthorne approaches the room as the little girl would, imagining an arbitrary division between the two regions of the room. Hawthorne treats his parlor in the Old Manse as if it is divided into the reality and make-believe, what he terms the Actual and the Imaginary, whose borders he may cross much as Pearl travels across the separation between Boston and her mother’s home in the forest: “[T]he floor of 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 imbue itself with the nature of the other” (29). As previous critics have noted, Hawthorne applies the same difference between the Actual and the Imaginary to the Custom-House, in that the lower floors constitute a very solid reality of paperwork and oafish coworkers, whereas the upper floors represent the

highest point of the body: the mind.<sup>16</sup> Here, much as Pearl communicates with the trees and the animals, Hawthorne imagines interacting with ghosts, or, upon returning home, “convert[ing moonlit forms] from snow-images into men and women” (29). The process of substantiating solids from airy things is the reversal of Hawthorne’s action at the end of “The Custom-House,” in which he reforms Salem as a dreamland. In these two instances, however, Hawthorne reshapes reality as something imaginary, yet he also admits his difficulty in engaging his creativity due to his tedious work at the Custom-House: “An entire class of susceptibilities, and a gift connected with them [...] was gone from me” (30). Nevertheless, the imaginative process remains and allows him to envision the unique in the mundane. Creativity is the process Hawthorne and Pearl use in order to find something new in their familiar and mundane settings. As a result, Hawthorne may end his preface with the characterization of Salem as only a dream, the Imaginary within the Actual, the unfamiliar inside the familiar, the foreign inside the domestic, and hence travel within home.

The lesson Hawthorne learns from Pearl’s example, or the principles he has her embody in order to be an example for traveling within home, relates to the definition he applies to literature. In the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne links his ideas about itinerancy to romanticism, arguing that both involve manipulating what a person senses into what he or she can perceive. He defines the romance as the opportunity to “claim a certain latitude”<sup>17</sup> to alter a work’s “fashion and material, which he would not have felt

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Newberry suggests the lower floor represents “modern Salem—essentially a wasteland—and the Puritan ancestors whose dogmas and Anglophobia gave narrow direction to it from the start” whereas the upper floor constitutes the “aesthetic and historical traditions” the author acquires from the imaginative writings of the deceased Surveyor Pue (152). Rowe, although also arguing that the first story constitutes more reality than the second story, prefers to think of the lower floor as the commodification of writing, as each surveyor uses his words in order to complete shipping details rather than, as Hawthorne would, to create literature.

<sup>17</sup> Here, Hawthorne uses an appropriately geographical term to emphasize the aspect of travel inherent to the Romance.

himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel” (*House 3*). In the romance, Hawthorne finds an opportunity to write the stories he desires, but, more than that, the latitude he gains from the Romance is the ability to undo the boundaries of his community, to alter home into various locations that appear different, so that he can travel between them. He may “mingle the Marvelous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the Public” (*House 3*). In other words, he combines his actual surroundings with his imaginative interpretations, such as in “The Custom-House” when he views his moonlit room as both familiar and unfamiliar. His encounter with the objects in his house is, as he describes in *The House of the Seven Gables*, the opportunity to re-interpret his commonplace surroundings as new experiences. His perception of the room is no different from what he defines as the romance, which affords him the opportunity to “manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture” (*House 3*). As a result, imagination possesses the freedom necessary to manipulate reality itself; rather than deny reality, Hawthorne determines how to combine the Public, or the Actual, with his concepts of the Imaginary and the Marvelous in order to arrive at a new interpretation of an enduring, unavoidable, but changeable reality. When writing, he can see a bright setting, but he understands how to reinterpret the situation, to consider some dark aspects of the locale and accent them, to mystify the scene.

The significance the romance has for Hawthorne’s characterization of travel is the process of making the familiar unfamiliar. In both his writing and his ideas of itinerancy, he changes his community into a foreign land. For example, he considers his abode at the Old Manse to be “home” whereas everything separate from it is unfamiliar, hence making his

tenure at the Custom-House the process of working abroad, trekking to another location. Despite concerns that boundaries, such as the ones between his residence and everything separate, between diverse nations, or between the actual and the imaginary, are too firm to manipulate, Hawthorne may manipulate borders between such locations because they are arbitrary demarcations, only imaginary lines running along maps or in his own mind.

“‘Romance,’” at least in the opinion of Brown, “‘simply refers to the imaginative form through which Hawthorne relayed and investigated a variety of views about American experience” (122 n4). Boundaries, national or otherwise, are the result of a creative act, the arbitrary design of people, whether by the agreement of a democracy or the decision of one dictator:

While the national certainly affects its citizens, and especially seems to preoccupy Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne significantly presents the nation – and critical accounts of it – as part of people’s imaginative and actual lives, not as the determinant of them. (Brown 141)

Even in cases in which nature itself, with mountains and rivers, physically separates groups of people from each other, the boundaries exist only because people signify such natural landmarks as unchangeable; nothing can stop one person from finding the similarities he or she shares with another, whether a heritage or merely the quality of being human, despite the river that separates their houses. With local and national borders arising based on the imagination of people, an author such as Hawthorne may reinterpret what it means to be a citizen of Salem or a citizen of somewhere else, or a little girl becoming a resident of Europe or a woman in the world. Much as Pearl determines how to make her surroundings into a variety of unexplored, foreign regions, Hawthorne sees how literature and itinerancy both involve reframing what he senses, to arrive at a new perception.

The prefatory treatment of the romance, considering its similarities to travel, leads to a consideration of the journey and residency in *The House of the Seven Gables*. The topic is appropriate, as Hawthorne considers arguments he had touched upon thirteen months earlier when he completed *The Scarlet Letter* before printing the latter romance in April 1851 (*The House of the Seven Gables* ix). Furthermore, assuming Hawthorne planned to link the preface to the story, much as he linked “The Custom-House” to *The Scarlet Letter*, he begins *The House of the Seven Gables* with his claim about what constitutes the romance before he narrates a story about travel and home; he does so in order to emphasize the link between both concepts. Just as his earlier work considered the troubles Hawthorne and Pearl undergo in order to adapt to constraining environments, the author now focuses on the Pyncheon and Maule families, two groups who desire freedom from the confines of the eponymous house and, in relation to the building, the expectations of their ancestors. One character in particular, Clifford Pyncheon, serves as the Pearl character in the romance. He is imaginative and innocent, but not a child; he is an adult, wearing an “aged, faded, ruined face” (Chapter VII: 83), initially appearing too debilitated to be as simultaneously precocious and wicked as the little girl of *The Scarlet Letter*. In the final chapters of *House*, however, he becomes more playful and even devious, “not merely grown young” but “a child again” (Chapter X: 106), particularly during a train ride away from his home during which he defends bank-robbers and murderers from being captured thanks to the innovations of the electric telegraph (Chapter XVII-186-7). His comments seem to arise due to his implication in the murder of his uncle, but, although introduced to the reader as an alleged killer, Clifford has committed no crime. He has not killed anyone, yet he suffers as an outcast in a manner similar to Pearl, forced into an exile from the community, confined to the House due to the

misdeeds of an ancestor, misdeeds that culminate into a curse brought on by Clifford's double-dealing grandfather, Colonel Pyncheon.

*The House of the Seven Gables*, however, intensifies what Hawthorne discusses in his previous work while also complicating the benefits travel provides. For the prior three chapters, I have considered how Hawthorne and Pearl require both residency and itinerancy, as each corrects the flaws of the other; neither option is complete on its own but requires the simultaneous use of both, the ability to maintain an abode while also moving away from it. This point becomes more apparent when considering Clifford Pyncheon. The character's imprisonment initially appears as only torment, and his journeys improve his character. A train ride away from the House, however, identifies the benefits that home possesses but that the excursion lacks. Whereas the theme of travel is more understated in *The Scarlet Letter*, overshadowed by other considerations of sin, guilt, and the community, which, of course, are also present in *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne emphasizes the problems of permanent residency in the latter romance by expending numerous pages on the confining, dilapidated quality of the "desolate, decaying, gusty, rusty old house of the Pyncheon family" (Chapter I: 22). The romance reads like an extended version of "The Custom-House," providing a more in-depth look at the constraints of home as Clifford recognizes the edifice's function as a prison, the result of his family's notoriety.<sup>18</sup> From his travels, however,

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<sup>18</sup> Many other characters in *The House of the Seven Gables* provide interesting considerations about how home and travel do not conflict but rather bolster each other. For example, Hepzibah Pyncheon, much like her brother Clifford, refuses to leave the House due to obligations to her deceased ancestors and feelings of unsuitability in her community; she is another version of Hawthorne from "The Custom-House," consigned to serve her forefathers but incapable of associating with her neighbors. Another essay considering travel and home resides in *The House of the Seven Gables*, but, given the length already of this thesis, I leave off an analysis of Hepzibah for another time. For this reason, I will be looking at Clifford's behavior in the romance, as well as the duplicity, in both lies and duality, of his pseudo-mentor, Holgrave. Nevertheless, Hepzibah's predilections further support arguments I will make concerning her brother's inability to function and the difficulties of integrating into the community.



Clifford learns itinerancy is insufficient; his train ride leads him to realize his dependence on other people, particularly his family.

Remaining at home, partially due to his probation from prison and his nervousness after leaving such a long confinement, Clifford finds no benefits from the decaying House but only stagnation:

From the inertness, or what we may term the vegetative character of his ordinary mood, Clifford would perhaps have been content to spend one day after another, interminably—or, at least throughout the summer-time—in just the kind of life described in the proceeding pages. (Chapter XI: 113)

Although enjoying the company of his younger cousin, Phoebe, Clifford is a prisoner of the House, only gazing out at the community through his window but never capable of participating in this outside world. Much as Hawthorne contends with his inability to uncover a hospitable location to express his creativity, Clifford sees himself not as a person in his town but a ghost, unfit to interact with his neighbors. There was a time in which he may have been a part of the community, but, as he tells Hepzibah, “it is too late”: “We are ghosts! We have no right among human beings,—no right anywhere but in this old house, which has a curse on it, and which, therefore, we are doomed to haunt!” (Chapter XI: 121). By noting his curse, the one imparted onto his grandfather by the eldest Maule, Clifford also sees the same pressure inflicted onto him by his ancestors. In the same way that Hawthorne remains a captive of Salem and the dilapidated Custom-House due to his relatives’ fame and sins, so is Clifford a prisoner because of the Colonel’s crimes in the decaying House of the Seven Gables.

Escaping from the House is no easier than escaping the Custom-House was for Hawthorne. The residence may be miserable, but, as Michael William Menard notes,

“Clifford’s attempts to associate with the world around him are fraught with peril” (56), requiring sacrifice in order to reconnect with the people around him. Hawthorne has to sacrifice his creativity in order to remain a part of Salem, or he must lose his forefathers’ fame in order to travel elsewhere. The price for Clifford’s freedom, however, may be his demise; as Menard notes, “his attempt to enter more fully the ‘whole procession’ of the street below is predicated upon a leap sure to cause harm, and even death” (56). In “The Arched Window,” Clifford is miserable because he does not have the stamina to participate in the parade he sees below his window. As “he grew pale, he threw an appealing look at Hepzibah and Phoebe,” but neither comprehends from his look the enthrallment he has for the scene that “so fascinate[s] him, that he would hardly be restrained from plunging into the surging stream of human sympathies” (Chapter XI: 118). As important as it is for him to relate to his neighbors in order to become happier, the danger that accompanies the pursuit may be death; although he desires to free himself from his prison, Clifford’s intent “to become part of ‘the great centre of humanity’ would entail the loss of life” (Menard 56). Clifford can either “feel[] himself man again,” no longer “estranged from his race” but at the cost of his life, or he can remain forever separated from his community (Chapter XI: 118). At this point in the romance, Hawthorne characterizes residency and travel as a choice; either Clifford will stay a prisoner in the House or he will die.<sup>19</sup> The home appears safer in

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<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Bercovitch and his concept from *The Office of The Scarlet Letter* concerning Hawthorne’s manipulation of choices. As Bercovitch argues, *The Scarlet Letter*’s Hester allows for the transition from “either/or,” a policy of choosing either isolation from the community or integration with the Puritans, to “both/and,” in which Hester pursues her protests but within a society that constrains and incorporates her dissent. Both Bercovitch and I are considering how the individual integrates into the community. I differ from his argument, however, both in considering Clifford as an example of “either/or,” something Bercovitch does not bring up, and in considering how *The Scarlet Letter* demonstrates “both/and” not through Hester’s incorporated dissent but through Hawthorne and Pearl’s abilities to be simultaneously within and outside the community.

comparison to the drastic actions Clifford would have to take in order to remove himself from the House's debilitating influence.

Based on the lack of stimulation from the inadequate surroundings of his dwelling, the initial solution for Clifford's problems requires finding a safer way of integrating into the community, a solution stemming largely from another character, Holgrave. As I will argue, however, his status as a traveler is a complex idea to consider because it actually suggests itinerancy is no more of a complete solution than home because what is needed is both home and travel. As Menard argues, a person must maintain involvement with the community in order to function well as a human being. In effect, Menard here seems to be following Holgrave's advice, urging the importance of "meet[ing] the world" (Chapter XX: 217 qtd in Menard 71). Holgrave, a daguerreotypist and tenant at the House, argues that the Pyncheons must leave their domicile in order to travel, as such permanent fixtures as buildings and houses impose restrictions on humans, circumventing attempts to adapt and improve. More than that, however, Menard argues that Holgrave is the appropriate character to argue for the benefits of travel, since he serves as the in-between character, capable of existing "as both social observer and outside participant" in his isolation, both resident and wanderer (60). In one way, Holgrave is like Hawthorne, an artist, a daguerreotypist, who reinterprets reality, "destabilizing and transforming the society around him" (Menard 59) but prefers not to remain fixed in any one location, instead remaining "[h]omeless as he has been" (Chapter XII: 126). He claims not to root himself into the accustomed, especially not because of any expectation from his ancestors. "Holgrave [is] firmly outside the social matrix," hardly fitting into one niche of the community but disrupting the cohesion of the community (Menard 59). According to Menard's argument, Holgrave, supposedly disrupting the concept

of residency by reinterpreting his surroundings, is a traveler in the same sense that I refer to Hawthorne and Pearl as travelers, re-describing their environments as many foreign lands in one location.

Where I disagree with Menard, however, is his characterization of Holgrave as the unruly character who leads the Pyncheons into the community. I would argue instead that Holgrave actually leads the family back to the very permanence of residency. Menard iconizes Holgrave as the example of entering the world and departing from the House into the community, but his example of the daguerreotypist is problematic for three reasons. First, I would argue that Holgrave is not both traveler and resident as Menard argues, but is a character who transitions from one role to another, in a manner like that of Hester and the Puritans changing from expatriates of England to citizens of the Boston colony. Menard already describes Holgrave as the artist, reinterpreting the world as something new and different, but he takes the characterization further, suggesting the character, “as both artist and reformer, [...] serves as the incarnate representative of the existentialist Everyman—a role he will ultimately surrender, for love, and domesticity, and social comfort and acceptability” (62). According to Menard’s argument, Holgrave repudiates his earlier stance on itinerancy in order to pursue permanency. At the end of the story, he lives with the Pyncheons in a new edifice, one, granted, that is away from the troubles of the House of the Seven Gables but, nevertheless, is the continuation of permanent residency. He does not balance home and travel; he favors the former. The second problem with Holgrave concerns his intentions, concealed for most of the romance and contradicting the contentions that he makes to the Pyncheons about the need to depart the House of the Seven Gables and find a dwelling elsewhere. Clifford and Hepzibah’s predecessors built the House on land

unethically acquired from Holgrave's ancestor, Matthew Maule, the man Colonel Pyncheon executed. When Holgrave advocates simply tearing down buildings and reinstating a nomadic lifestyle, his motives belie his claims. Finally, despite his wanderings and his ability to locate many residences in a variety of locations, Holgrave concludes the romance with a desire, or, rather, his fate, to find permanence in the past and with other people. Upon confronting death, in the form of the deceased Jaffrey Pyncheon, Holgrave cannot maintain his doctrine of continuous travel; the corpse is an impediment in his path, blocking him from pursuing his frivolous wanderings and causing "[t]he world [to] look[] strange, wild, evil, hostile" (Chapter XX: 216). Because of his confrontation with this impediment, Holgrave is forced to admit that he depends on his forefathers and on the permanence of the home:

I have a presentiment, that, hereafter, it will be my lot to set out trees, to make fences—perhaps, even, in due time, to build a house for another regeneration—in a word, to conform myself to laws, and the peaceful practice of society. (Chapter XX: 216)

Holgrave's last speech in the romance, in which he praises the permanence of his new house with the Pyncheons, indicates that his comments about residency, whether honest or not, complicate the idea of travel so that it is insufficient for a person. Although Holgrave argues that people must roam or else stagnate, he sees that rootlessness can leave a person uncertain and, at the end of the romance, behaves more like Hester than Pearl, preferring to confine himself to one location for the rest of his life.

Because Holgrave's argument ultimately favors permanent residency, hence permanent confinement, to the House, his ideas cannot help Clifford with his problems as a prisoner within his own house. Holgrave's fate at the conclusion to *The House of the Seven Gables* is to remain in one dwelling, a conclusion that arises due to the problems Hawthorne

presents as the result of the exclusive pursuit of travel without balancing it with home, particularly during Clifford's train ride. The man leaves with Hepzibah in order to abandon the House, at which time he echoes many of Holgrave's own contentions about the problems of enduring buildings and immobile humans. Making comments that match Hawthorne's thoughts in "The Custom-House," Clifford claims that permanent residency is an impediment:

It is as clear to me as sunshine—were there any in the sky—that the greatest possible stumbling-blocks in the path of human happiness and improvement, are these heaps of bricks, and stones, consolidated with mortar, or hewn timber, fastened together with spike-nails, which men painfully contrive for their own torment, and call them house and home! (Chapter XVII: 184)

Clifford goes on to argue that the train, in contrast, is a form of travel and hence a solution to the stagnation of prolonged residential dormancy, offering "a wide sweep and frequent change" by "bring[ing] us round again to the nomadic state" (183). The flaw with Clifford's claim, however, is that travel does not improve his situation. Although the train provides greater freedom to move, Clifford finds himself lost in his liberty when he departs for a new area through which to wander. Arriving in a dark region, he and Hepzibah determine that, away from home and everything they left there, "[t]he world had fled away from these two wanderers" (Chapter XVIII: 188). Their surroundings consist of ruin, "relics of a wood-pile" and the blackened and decaying edifices of a church and "a farm-house in the old style" (Chapter XVIII: 188). Just as Hawthorne concludes that he is trapped in dilapidation when remaining in his residence, Clifford finds himself still amongst the ruins when he travels. The decaying surroundings as well make him lose his creativity; much like Hawthorne during his Custom-House tenure, Clifford cannot decide on an inventive solution in order to contend with his desolate surroundings because his "thoughts, fantasies, and strange aptitude [for] words [...] had entirely subsided" (Chapter XVII: 188). Hawthorne becomes only a

surveyor in “The Custom-House,” and Clifford becomes only a lost child in the darkness. He turns to Hepzibah, demanding her help, much as he had earlier when he was incapable of providing for his childish self: “You must take the lead now, Hepzibah!” With a terse remark—“Do with me as you will!” (Chapter XVII: 188)—Clifford loses the independence he once had and instead relinquishes his newfound authority to Hepzibah, someone who cannot see well enough to lead them out of the darkness. He is lost without his home.

Menard and I differ in our considerations of Hawthorne and Clifford and how their actions lead to what Hawthorne characterizes as the solution about home and travel. Menard maintains that integration into the community requires following the rules of society, leading to Holgrave’s change from radical nomad to domesticated homebody. I, on the other hand, think Hawthorne suggests residency and journeying are not completely successful options when separated and therefore must be used together; each choice relies on the benefits offered by the other. The solution is not Menard’s idea of conforming to the community but a new way of balancing both home and travel. Granted, Holgrave is not the traveler-within-the-home, and Clifford is confined to the House, but the answer is not for the reader to think that both characters in themselves embody both home and travel simultaneously. As the progression of the plot demonstrates, Holgrave changes from arguing for itinerancy to favoring the house, whereas Clifford is trapped inside his home but eventually escapes, though temporarily, through travel. Both characters, when taken together, provide a better answer about how to balance home and travel; whereas Hawthorne uses Pearl or himself as a solitary example of striking that balance, his ideas become more complex in *The House of the Seven Gables*, requiring two characters to make his point about balance. Clifford, upon encountering his “dreary home,” tells Hepzibah that she “ha[s] done well to bring [him]

hither!” (217) because the building brings him back to his cousin and sister. Clifford now “appear[s] the stronger” (217) because family serves as his link to the community, a fixture to which he may attach himself as Holgrave and Phoebe lead them into the neighborhood and eventually to an edifice far away from the House of the Seven Gables. Much as Green claims that “The Custom-House” is a troubling but necessary experience in order to improve Hawthorne, Clifford finds that the trek, although taking him to an uncertain location, nevertheless improves him, making him realize the family he loses by abandoning his residence. He needs to maintain his connections to his home and his family while simultaneously travel, which implies that Clifford must, at least one time, abandon his dwelling in order to increase that home-feeling, which is “never realized during [a person’s] seasons of actual residence here,” but only when the person departs for some period of time (“The Custom-House” 10).

The significance of *The House of the Seven Gables* is that the romance elaborates on concerns Hawthorne expresses earlier in *The Scarlet Letter* about the insufficiency of only residency or only travel in order to contend with constraints against creativity. My argument coincides in part with what Bell proposes about literature as a temporary reprieve from the reality around the author. Literature can be freeing, for, “[a]s a romancer, [...] Hawthorne finds a freedom denied by the actuality of Puritan Boston or nineteenth-century Salem” (179). Where I diverge from Bell’s contention, however, is with respect to his claims that Hawthorne remains skeptical of regarding reality as the Imaginary rather than the Actual. According to Bell’s argument, Hawthorne would not characterize writing as a journey because to do so would not be to experience life as it really is. To do so would be to treat the words in his book as a path away from his office at the Custom-House, to consider them as



having some function outside of their observational capacity, even perhaps some spiritual function. As Bell maintains, Hawthorne may believe that spirituality is possible, but he “hardly believed that it could be known, that it could be glimpsed by the imagination” (132). Instead, to make literature into travel would be an imaginative interpretation of life in which the body remains at home while the mind *distorts* reality, altering it into what Hawthorne himself describes as a dreamland. Imagination is not a connection to the spiritual realm, a way of arriving into some suspension of reality; instead, “Hawthorne associated imagination not with mystical insight but with cold intellect—with what he calls, in ‘the Custom-House,’ ‘the cold spirituality of the moonbeams’” (29 qtd in 132). According to Bell’s argument, Hawthorne would never alter reality with his fiction; however, his literature also frees him from his reality. I think there is a way in which the author of *The Scarlet Letter* can liberate himself from the restrictions imposed on him by his inescapable physical surroundings, despite what Bell claims. If writing is about imagination, as I argue, and if literature gives reprieve to Hawthorne from his life, as Bell argues, then the imagination must do something to reinterpret, although not necessarily distort, reality. Although I disagree with parts of Bell’s assertion, he includes a quote from Hawthorne that speaks to this point: “A veil may be needful, but never a mask” (qtd in 23). Hawthorne is not talking about disregarding but suspending reality, leaving it temporarily in order to return when necessary.

I will conclude with a final consideration of the link between “The Custom-House” and *The Scarlet Letter*, in light of the examples from *The House of the Seven Gables* and critics’ ideas about the relation of the preface to the story. Brook Thomas considers how Hawthorne and Pearl end their respective stories by traveling to a new, unfamiliar location:

Rather than raise a child inculcated in proper values to serve the nation/  
commonwealth, Hester raises a child who finds “a home and comfort” in an  
“unknown region,” just as Hawthorne ends “The Custom-House” imagining himself a  
“citizen of somewhere else.” (194-5)

Thomas ignores, however, what Hawthorne emphasizes in *The House of the Seven Gables*:  
that travel by itself is incomplete but rather makes an individual find greater appreciation for  
his or her residence. Hawthorne and Pearl discover comfort in their abodes: Hawthorne  
continues to feel a kinship to Salem because of his ancestors, and Pearl remains in Boston  
because of her mother’s presence in the town. I do not deny that Hawthorne had a difficult  
time finding a solution in “The Custom-House” for avoiding the negative influences his  
hometown has on his imagination. As Dan McCall argues, the author “felt a terrible  
incompatibility between esthetic and moral excellence” (350). The problem for Hawthorne  
becomes determining how to preserve his creativity by remaining in exile while also  
continuing to be an upstanding member of his community, interacting with his neighbors and  
being a citizen of Salem. “The Custom-House,” however, forces Hawthorne to ask himself:  
“What is my relationship to my homeland?” (350). Hawthorne questions how he must  
balance his career as an author and his obligations to his predecessors’ town. McCall tries to  
answer the question through Hester Prynne’s interactions with her Puritan Boston community,  
but, in this thesis, I have proposed that Pearl, as opposed to her mother, is Hawthorne’s  
model traveler, informing the author how he should cooperate with his neighbors.  
Hawthorne identifies with Pearl, not only because they are both artists in exile, but because  
they both use their outsider status in order to move away from their homes without engaging  
in physical travel; Pearl is a stranger in Boston before boarding the ship to Europe, a traveler  
within her home, and Hawthorne’s attention wanders from Salem when his body remains in

town. The process of travel, therefore, is not literal but conceptual, a mindset a person is supposed to have before attempting to leave. Emerson says itinerancy is a faulty solution because travelers bring their problems with them regardless of the destination; Hawthorne, on the other hand, writes that a person needs to change his or her perspective about those problems before ever engaging in the journey.

Travel allows for a compromise, permitting a person to gain the benefits from both continents, which serves as the best solution in *The Scarlet Letter*, in preface and in story. The traveler gains experience elsewhere while retaining contact with the abode, hence with his or her past. I understand that some critics will not agree with my argument, considering evidence about the real-life Hawthorne, such as his dependence on Puritanism for his art, his praising of American society, or his inability to leave his community at the end of “The Custom-House.”<sup>20</sup> Despite those concerns, I want to consider not what problems the actual Hawthorne had, but what solutions he finds in his characters. The protagonist of “The Custom-House” and Pearl are capable not only of “departing” from their neighborhoods but of also remaining connected to home. These two characters discover a way to avoid mentally, but not physically, the boring and constraining aspects of their homes; Hawthorne and Pearl

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<sup>20</sup> Other examples include evidence that relates not to Hawthorne as a character in “The Custom-House” but to Hawthorne as the real-life artist. For example, he did not travel away from New England until he was 49, at which time he was the London consulate for the United States. A description of his office as “t a little patch of America, with English life encompassing it on all sides,” decorated with American flags, presidential portraits, and “adorned with the American eagle, painted on the wood,” reflects his inability, purposefully or not, to escape his identity as a citizen of the United States (qtd in Hull 20). Although Hawthorne later toured Italy and France, and published *The Marble Faun* and *Our Old Home* while abroad, he returned to the United States in 1860. Although he hoped for a later voyage back to Europe, thinking “the sea voyage and the ‘Old Home’ might set [him] all right” (Hawthorne qtd in Hull 222), he died before another trip in 1864. Other aspects of his life, such as his frustrations with an upcoming civil war, suggest the author continued to have problems with his home, at one point writing, “I don’t quite understand what we are fighting for. [...] Whatever happens next, I must say that I rejoice that the old Union is smashed. We never were one people and never really had a country since the Constitution was formed” (qtd in White 25). Despite his inability to leave the United States as much as he desired, or his ability to find a correlate the North and the South, his literature finds one connection, that between travel and home, so as not to favor one over the other.

allow their minds to wander onto other thoughts, even while their bodies remain rooted inside their birthplaces. The process is not an escape for the two characters; as evidenced in Hawthorne's deferential behavior to his grandfathers and Pearl's gifts from abroad to Hester, both characters recognize and continuously acknowledge their heritage. Thus, travel is not escape, but rather a way of maintaining strong associations with the home.

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