form; the test of form is what it embodies and shows forth. Her elaborate forms, without creative power behind them, seem inadequate for the extension of reality that we find in great art, Joyce's, for example, or Tolstoy's. Maybe another trouble is having too little vision of her own. Depending upon others not only for method but for insight, she remains a craftsman.

Her forms, however, are uncommonly well adapted for communication. Unlike some of the visionaries who tend to become obscure, she makes a vision clear to the common reader. Her function is translating the visions of major artists for those who could not receive them in the original. She does this by a surface so pleasing and limpid that it makes the depths immediately apparent. A fitting analogy for this effect is Sir John Denham's seventeenth-century river, at once the Thames and an ideal for public art:

Though deep, yet clear; though gentle yet not dull; Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.

Maybe her stream, like Denham's, is too clear. Great art is always mysterious; a great novel requires, invites, and rewards many readings, yet we never get to the bottom of it. Although we can fathom Rumer Godden at first reading or, in the case of that narcissus, at second, the public novel, for which one reading is plenty, has no greater master.

Hawthorne's Hester

Hester Prynne, the heroine of The Scarlet Letter, typifies romantic individualism, and in her story Hawthorne endeavored to exhibit the inadequacy of such a philosophy. The romantic individualist repudiates the doctrine of a supernatural ethical absolute. He rejects both the authority of God, which sanctions a pietistic ethic, and the authority of society, which sanctions a utilitarian ethic, to affirm the sole authority of Nature. Hester, violating piety and decorum, lived a life of nature and attempted to rationalize her romantic self-indulgence; but, although she broke the laws of God and man, she failed to secure even the natural satisfactions she sought.

Many modern critics, however, who see her as a heroine à la George Sand, accept her philosophy and regard her as the central figure of the romance—the spokesman of Hawthorne's views favoring "a larger liberty." Hawthorne's women are usually more sympathetic and impressive than his men; because Hester is more appealing than either her husband or her lover, it is easy to disregard their more central roles in the story. Furthermore, the title of the romance is commonly taken to refer mainly to the letter on Hester's dress and thus somehow to designate her as the central figure;

2 "Hester Prynne... becomes, really, after the first scene, an accessory figure; it is not upon her the denouement depends" (Henry James, Hawthorne [New York, 1879], p. 109). James had a virtue excellent and rare among readers: he attended to his author's total intention and exposition. Apparently Hester's modern champions are misled by their prepossessions; they share the general tendency of our time to believe more strongly in the reality and value of natural instincts than in the truth and accessibility of supernatural absolutes.

1 Purdue University.
but, in fact, the ideal letter, not any particular material manifestation of it, is referred to in the title. Actually its most emphatic particular manifestation is the stigma revealed on Dimmesdale’s breast in the climaxing chapter of the book, “The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter.”

Hester’s apologists unduly emphasize circumstances which seem to make her the engaging central figure of the romance, and they ignore or even decry the larger tendency of the book, which subordinates her and exposes her moral inadequacy. “She is a free spirit liberated in a moral wilderness.”

She has sinned, but the sin leads her straightway to a larger life. . . . Hawthorne . . . lets the sin elaborate itself, so far as Hester’s nature is concerned, into nothing but beauty. . . . Since her love for Dimmesdale was the one sincere passion of her life, she obeyed it utterly, though a conventional judgment would have said that she was stepping out of the moral order. There is nothing in the story to suggest condemnation of her or of the minister in their sin. . . . The passion itself, as the two lovers still agree at the close of their hard experience, was sacred and never caused them repentance.

This opinion sublimely disregards Hawthorne’s elaborate exposition of the progressive moral dereliction of Hester, during which “all the light and graceful foliage of her character [was] withered up by this red-hot brand” of sinful passion. It even more remarkably ignores her paramour’s seven-year-long travail of conscience for (in his own dying words) “the sin here so awfully revealed.”

The most recent and immoderate advocate of Hester as the prepossessing exponent of a wider freedom in sexual relations is Professor Frederic I. Carpenter:


4 John Erskine, CHAL, II, 26–27.

In the last analysis, the greatness of The Scarlet Letter lies in the character of Hester Prynne. Because she dared to trust herself to believe in the possibility of a new morality in the new world, she achieved spiritual greatness in spite of her own human weakness, in spite of the prejudices of her Puritan society, . . . in spite of the prejudices of her creator himself.

It is a tribute to Hawthorne’s art that Hester’s champion believes in her so strongly that he presumes to rebuke her creator for abusing her and rejoices in his conviction that she triumphs over the author’s “denigrations.”

In fact, Hawthorne does feel moral compassion for Hester, but her role in the story is to demonstrate that persons who engage our moral compassion may nevertheless merit moral censure. We sympathize with Hester at first because of her personal attraction, and our sympathy deepens throughout the story because we see that she is more sinned against than sinning.

The prime offender against her is Roger Chillingworth, who married her before she was mature enough to know the needs of her nature. There is a tincture of Godwinism—even of Fourierism—in Hawthorne’s treatment of Hester’s breach of her marriage obligations. Godwin held that marriage was “the most odious of all monopolies” and that it was everyone’s duty to love the worthiest. After her lapse, Hester told her husband, “Thou knowest I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any.” According to Godwinian principles, then, her duty to him was slight, especially if a man came along whom she could love. Chillingworth freely acknowledged that he had wronged her in marrying her before she was aware of the needs of her nature: “Mine was the first wrong, when

5 “Scarlet A Minus,” College English, V (January, 1944), 179.
I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay." His second, less heinous, offense was his neglectfully absenting himself from her after their marriage. His experience understood what her innocence could not foresee, that the awakening passion in her might take a forbidden way: "If sages were ever wise in their own behoof, I might have foreseen all this." His third and culminating offense was his lack of charity toward her after her disgrace. Although he admitted his initial culpability in betraying her into "a false and unnatural relation," he refused to share the odium brought upon her in consequence of the situation he had created. True, he plotted no revenge against her, but cold forbearance was not enough. He was motivated not by love but by self-love; in his marriage and in his vengeance he cherished and pursued his private objects, to the exclusion of the claims of others, whose lives were involved with his own. He regarded his wife jealously, as a chattel, not as a person with needs and rights of her own. Her error touched his compassion only perfunctorily, but it gave a mortal wound to his amour-propre. Hester's adulterous passion was nobler, for she wished that she might bear her paramour's shame and anguish as well as her own. Thus Chillingworth triply offended against her: he drew her into a relationship which made her liable to sin, did not duly defend her from the peril in which he had placed her, and cast her off when she succumbed.

The nature of Dimmesdale's offense against Hester is too obvious to require specification, but both Hester's conduct and his own deserve whatever extenuation may be due to the passionate and impulsive errors of inexperience: "This had been a sin of passion, not of principle, nor even purpose." The minister's conduct toward Hester, then, is less blameworthy than her husband's, who had knowingly and deliberately jeopardized her happiness and moral security; Dimmesdale tells Hester: "We are not, Hester, the worst sinners in the world. There is one worse than even the polluted priest!" A distinction must be made, however, between Dimmesdale's moral responsibility and Hester's; her sin was contingent upon his, and her conduct is therefore more deserving of palliation than his. Besides, he had moral defenses and moral duties which she did not have. He had a pastoral duty toward her and a professional duty to lead an exemplary life. Also, according to Hawthorne's view of the distinctive endowments of the sexes, Hester depended upon her womanly feeling, but he had the guidance of masculine intellect and moral erudition. Above all, he was free to marry to satisfy "the strong animal nature" in him, but Hester met her happiest choice too late, when she was "already linked and wedlock bound to a fell adversary." But the minister's really abominable fault was not his fornication; it was his unwillingness to confess his error, his hypocrisy. Hester wished she might bear his shame as well as her own, but he shrank from assuming his place beside her because his perilous pride in his reputation for sanctity was dearer to him than truth. Like Chillingworth, he wronged Hester and left her to bear the punishment alone.

Society wronged Hester as grievously as, though less invidiously than, particular persons wronged her. Hawthorne distinguished between society under its in-

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6 "Woman is born for love, and it is impossible to turn her from seeking it. Men should deserve her love as an inheritance, rather than seize and guard it like prey" (Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century [Boston, 1893], p. 337).
distinctively human aspect and society under its institutional aspect. Society as collective humanity sympathized and was charitable: "It is to the credit of human nature, that, except where its selfishness is brought into play, it loves more readily than it hates." But society under its institutional aspect pursued an abstraction, conceived as the general good, which disposed it vindictively toward errant individuals. Hawthorne remarked in "The New Adam and Eve": "[The] Judgment Seat [is] the very symbol of man's perverted state." A scheme of social justice supplanted the essential law of love which is grounded in human hearts; any system of expedient regulations tends to become sacrosanct eventually, so that instead of serving humanity it becomes a tyrannical instrument for coercing nonconformists.

Harsh legalism has been remarked as a characteristic of the Puritan theocracy by social historians: "The effect of inhumane punishments on officials and the popular mind generally . . . [was apparently] a brutalizing effect . . ., rendering them more callous to human sufferings." "To make the people good became the supreme task of the churches, and legalism followed as a matter of course." "The theory was that Jehovah was the primary law-giver, the Bible a statute-book, the ministers and magistrates stewards of the divine will." Hester, then, Hawthorne tells us, suffered "the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law" in "a period when the forms of authority were felt to possess the sacredness of Divine institutions." Her punishment shows how society had set aside the humane injunction that men should love one another, to make a religion of the office of vengeance, which in the Scriptures is exclusively appropriated to God. The wild-rose bush, with "its delicate gems," which stood by the prison door, and "the burdock, pigweed, apple-peru, and other such unsightly vegetation" which grew with such appropriate luxuriance in the prison yard symbolize the mingled moral elements in "the dim, awful, mysterious, grotesque, intricate nature of man." Puritan society, unfortunately, had cultivated the weeds and neglected the flowers of human nature and attached more significance to "the black flower of civilized life, a prison," than to the rose bush, "which, by a strange chance, has been kept alive in history" "to symbolize some sweet moral blossom." There is powerful irony in Hawthorne's picture of the harsh matrons who crowded around the pillory to demand that Hester be put to death: "Is there not law for it? Truly, there is, both in Scripture and the statute-book." Surely Hawthorne was here mindful of the question which the scribes and Pharisees put to Jesus concerning the woman taken in adultery: "Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" The harshness of this tirade reflects the perversion of womanliness which has been wrought among this "people amongst whom religion and law were almost iden-


* Merrill, op. cit., p. 766.

* Hawthorne remarked, in the American Notebooks, that "there is an unmistakable analogy between the wicked weeds and the bad habits and sinful propensities which have overrun the moral world." There is an excellent explication of the symbolism of The Scarlet Letter in H. H. Waggner's "Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Cemetery, the Prison, and the Rose," University of Kansas City Review, XIV (spring, 1948), 175-90.
tical." A man in the crowd offered timely reproof to the chider: "Is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows?"—a reminder that virtue must be voluntary, an expression of character, and that there is little worth in a virtue that is compulsory, an imposition of society.

The ostracism called too lenient a punishment by the perhaps envious matrons of the town was almost fatal to Hester's sanity and moral sense, for it almost severed "the many ties, that, so long as we breathe the common air . . . , unite us to our kind." "Man had marked this woman's sin by a scarlet letter, which had such potent and disastrous efficacy that no human sympathy could reach her, save it were sinful like herself." Even children "too young to comprehend wherefore this woman should be shut out from the sphere of human charities" learned to abhor the woman upon whom society had set the stigma of the moral outcast. The universal duty of "acknowledging brotherhood even with the guiltiest" was abrogated in the treatment of Hester:

In all her intercourse with society, . . . there was nothing which made her feel as if she belonged to it. . . . She was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of human kind. She stood apart from moral interests, yet close beside them, like a ghost that revisits the familiar fireside, and can no longer make itself seen or felt.

The peculiar moral danger to Hester in her isolation was that it gave her too little opportunity for affectionate intercourse with other persons. Hawthorne regarded a woman's essential life as consisting in the right exercise of her emotions. His attitude toward women is that of Victorian liberalism; he looked upon them as equal to men, but differently endowed. To him, the distinctive feminine virtues were those characteristic of ideal wifehood and motherhood: instinctive purity and passionate devotion. His prescription for the happiest regulation of society was "Man's intellect, moderated by Woman's tenderness and moral sense." Dimmesdale's history shows the corruption of the masculine virtues of reason and authority in a sinner who has cut himself off from the divine source of those virtues; Hester's history shows the corruption of the feminine virtues of passion and submission in a sinner who has been thrust out from the human community on which those virtues depend for their reality and function. In this essential feminine attribute, the working of her moral sensibility through her feelings rather than her thought, she bears a strong general resemblance to Milton's Eve (who is, however, more delicately conceived). She is a pure (as Hardy used the term) or very (as Shakespeare would have said) woman: that is, a charmingly real woman whose abundant sexuality, "whatever hypocrites austerely talk," was the characteristic and valuable endowment of her sex.

In consequence of her ostracism, Hester's life turned, "in a great measure, from passion and feeling, to thought"; she "wandered without a clew in the dark labyrinth of mind." Reflecting bitterly upon her own experience, she was convinced equally of the injustice and the hopelessness of a woman's position in society:

Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? As concerned her own

11 Ten-nyson wrote in "The Princess" that "woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse," and looked for a happier state of society when there should be "everywhere / Two heads in council, two beside the hearth, / Two in the tangled business of the world." Then, man would "gain in sweetness and in moral height," and woman in "mental breadth."
individual existence, she had long ago decided in the negative. . . . [A woman who considers what reforms are desirable discerns] a hopeless task before her. As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change; in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life, will be found to have evaporated.

Although Hawthorne to some degree sympathized with Hester's rebellious mood, he did not, as Stuart P. Sherman averred, represent her as "a free spirit liberated in a moral wilderness," but as a human derelict who "wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness." "A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought," and Hester's teachers—"Shame, Despair, Solitude!"—had "taught her much amiss." Thus, unfitted by her intense femininity for intellectual speculations, as well as by her isolation from the common experience of mankind, which rectifies aberrant thought, she unwomaned herself and deluded herself with mistaken notions.

The pathetic moral interdependence of persons is strikingly illustrated in the relations of Hester, Dimmesdale, and little Pearl. Dimmesdale acceded to Hester's plan of elopement because his will was enfeebled and he needed her resolution and affection to support him, but he was well aware that her proposals would be spiritually fatal to them. He evaded this death of the soul by the grace of God, who granted him in his death hour the strength to confess and deliver himself from the untruth which threatened his spiritual extinction. His dramatic escape fortuitously prevented Hester from surrendering her soul to mere nature in flight from her unhappiness. The rescue of her soul is as much a matter of accident as the shipwreck of her happiness had been. It is one of the truest touches of Hawthorne's art that Hester was not reclaimed to piety by the edifying spectacle of Dimmesdale's death in the Lord but that persistent in error, even as he expired in her arms breathing hosannas, she frantically insisted that her sole hope of happiness lay in personal reunion with him—in heaven, if not on earth.

One channel of moral affection in her life, however, had never been clogged—her love for little Pearl. This had sustained her in her long solitude by affording a partial outlet for her emotions, and Hawthorne's rather perfunctory and improbable "Conclusion" informs us that, when she had abated her resentment at being frustrated of worldly happiness, the affection between her and little Pearl drew her into a state of pious resignation and thus served as a means of positive redemption.

In the last analysis, the error for which Hester suffered was her too-obstinate supposition that human beings had a right to happiness. "Hester's tragedy came upon her in consequence of excessive yielding to her own heart." Haw thorne remarked in his notebooks that "happiness in this world, if it comes at all, comes incidentally. Make it the object of pursuit, and it leads us a wild goose chase, and is never attained." The proper pursuit of man, he thought, was not happiness but a virtuous life; he inherited the Puritan conviction that the good which God seeks and accomplishes is the display of infinite being, a good which

transcends the good of finite existence. If the misery of the sinner is conducive to such a display, which it must be because sinners are in fact miserable, then it is just and good that sinners should be punished with misery.\textsuperscript{13}

Although we are expected to love and pity Hester, we are not invited to condone her fault or to construe it as a virtue. More a victim of circumstances than a wilful wrongdoer, she is nevertheless to be held morally responsible. In her story Hawthorne intimates that, tangled as human relationships are and must be, no sin ever issues solely from the intent and deed of the individual sinner, but that it issue instead from a complicated interplay of motives of which he is the more or less willing instrument. Even so, however strong, insidious, and unforeseeable the influences and compulsions which prompted his sin, in any practicable sys-

tem of ethics the sinner must be held individually accountable for it. This is harsh doctrine, but there is no escape from it short of unflinching repudiation of the moral ideas which give man his tragic and lonely dignity in a world in which all things except himself seem insensate and all actions except his own seem mechanical. The Puritans were no more illogical in coupling the assumption of moral determinism with the doctrine of individual responsibility to God than is our own age in conjoining theories of biological and economic determinism with the doctrine of individual responsibility to society. The Puritan escaped from his inconsistency by remarking that God moves in a mysterious way; we justify ours by the plea of expediency. Hawthorne, however, was content merely to pose the problem forcibly in the history of Hester Prynne.

\textbf{Swift and Satire}

\textbf{Irvin Ehrenpreis\textsuperscript{1}}

Only a few critics—Ricardo Quintana, Herbert Davis, F. R. Leavis, and some others—have tried to be specific about the satiric methods of Jonathan Swift. Most discussions go no further than an epithet like “complex” or “subtle” and the quoting of several samples. It is, however, not impossible to define a number of his main devices and to show their relationships.

To begin with, Swift’s simple irony is plain enough. He writes the opposite of what he means, in a tone which indicates the real intention. But he can also be ironic about an irony. Gulliver’s exposition of English law, for instance (IV, v), contains as a simple irony the rule that an upright man can win a case only by corrupting his opponent’s counsel. The bribed lawyer—continues Gulliver in a higher irony—will then betray his own client by insinuating that the latter has justice on his side. (The judge is so depraved he will never give the decision to an honest party.) This method of betrayal is the reverse of what one would expect even within the initial irony. Yet it emphasizes the turpitude of the courts, which is of course Swift’s whole point.

It is possible to go on in the same way to a third level. Again the statement

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