Approach to the structural form of Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" as an aid to the general reader

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AN APPROACH TO THE STRUCTURAL FORM
OF HAWTHORNE'S THE SCARLET LETTER
AS AN AID TO THE GENERAL READER

by

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B.A., Montana State University, 1951

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Chairman of the Board of Examiners

Dean of the Graduate School

Date
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INTRODUCTION

Our title implies a desire to make the purpose of this thesis something more than academic. We will ignore the possibility that it may be a forlorn desire but we cannot ignore the fact that in order to express such a desire in the title we have sacrificed a clear statement of what we intend to do.

Our purpose will be to make an analysis of the structural form of The Scarlet Letter that will point out intricacies and interrelations that the general reader does not have the time to examine. We hope that our analysis will deepen and enlarge the experience that such a reader may gain from the novel. There is a whole, potential experience available to a mythical, ideal reader. Such an experience is an infinitude that this thesis pushes towards. There are approaches to the structural from other than ours; there are volumes, written and unwritten, on the meanings and implications of the novel, the personality, influences on and intentions of the author that all push further towards this infinitude. This thesis takes a very humble place among them.

We have chosen to approach the structure because it is the structural form of the novel that shapes and defines
the experience that the reader carries with him. The structural form welds the parts (character, scene, language, action, etc.) into one whole experience. We will examine these parts separately to determine the particular qualities of each and the place of each in relation to the others and then reunite them. The process will increase the reader's consciousness of the depths and intricacies of the whole and thus enlarge his experience. Our examination will follow the course of the novel and we will allow our conclusions to emerge in their natural order.
Hawthorne begins *The Scarlet Letter* by placing a scene before our eyes. It is not a clear scene for it contains no life and action; we are merely told that it exists.

A throng of bearded men, in sad-colored garments and grey, steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women, some wearing hoods and others bareheaded, was assembled in front of a wooden edifice, the door of which was heavily timbered with oak and studded with iron spikes.\(^1\)

The sentence suggests a particular scene that is capable of containing actual life but more directly it creates an impression of a group of people and a building. Only a few words convey the impression but they give it unmistakable qualities: The people wear sad-colored garments and grey, steeple-crowned hats, the building has a door of oak and iron. Hawthorne is content to leave it at that for the moment.

The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison.\(^2\)

The particular scene grows by indirect reference: the people

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2. Ibid.
are now colonists and the building is a prison. But at the same time that the building is becoming more particular it is also becoming more general. It is associated with death (the cemetery) and almost becomes synonymous with crime and evil as Hawthorne emphasises its ubiquity in human society.

But now Hawthorne is ready to place his group of people and his prison in time and space.

In accordance with this rule, it may safely be assumed that the forefathers of Boston had built the first prison-house somewhere in the vicinity of Cornhill, almost as seasonably as they marked out the first burial ground, on Isaac Johnson's lot, and round about his grave, which subsequently became the nucleus of all the congregated sepulchres in the old church-yard of King's Chapel.

Hawthorne adds credibility to his scene by a reference to the historical past of Boston; by the use of names like Isaac Johnson, Cornhill and King's Chapel. At the same time the association between the prison and the grave yard, crime and death is continued. But now, having given the prison credibility by historical references, Hawthorne is able to return to it.

Certain it is, that, some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age, which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front. The rust on the ponderous iron work of its oaken door looked more antique than anything else in the New World. Like all that pertains to crime, it seemed never to have known a youthful era. Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the

1. Hawthorne, loc.cit. p.112.
The throng of colonists in front of the Boston prison are now placed in time, some fifteen or twenty years after the first settlement. But Hawthorne's primary concern remains with the prison. He enlarges the picture in our mind's eye. The prison is weather-stained, beetle-browed and gloomy. The ponderous iron work of its door is rusted; before it is a grass-plot overgrown with weeds and beyond that the wheel-track that serves as a street. Again, however, he does not stop with physical description. Though the weather-stained prison has only stood these fifteen or twenty years it seems aged, like crime, with which it is almost synonymous, like death, with which it is associated. "Like all that pertains to crime, it seemed never to have known a youthful era."

And now the ugly building is associated with the unsightly weeds that grow in front of it. Not only are the adjectives "ugly" and "unsightly" suggestive of each other but Hawthorne also mentions that the weeds seemed to find "something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison." The association is clenched with the metaphor "black flower"; the prison too is an ugly plant growing from the same soil.

1. Hawthorne, loc.cit. p.112.
* See above.
At this early point we can already discern something of the method that Hawthorne is using. Let us recapitulate. He presents a bare scene, a group of people and a prison, and concentrates on the prison. His physical description is not detailed but is rendered, on the contrary, by a few particular words: The prison is gloomy, weather-stained and beetle-browed, its front is dominated by a ponderous oak door studded with rusty iron. It is language that evokes as much a mood as a picture. He carefully chooses the characteristics of the building that will evoke a certain response in the reader and that response is the same as one has to the function of the building. Crime is something gloomy and beetle-browed on the visage of man and this is particularly so among Hawthorne Puritans. Its punishment, especially among the Puritans, is a heavy and ponderous business of oak and iron sanctioned by a cold God. The Puritan tools of punishment are oak pillories and gallows, and iron bars. Thus, on the one hand Hawthorne uses physical description carefully, in order to reflect essential character and inner connotations, and on the other hand forces a definite picture into our imaginations. He reminds us with words like "weather-stained" and "rusty iron" that the elements play about this building; his reference to historical names sends us back to early Boston and he sets this prison on soil newly cleared from the wilderness by showing us the grass plot and the wheel-track
street in front. We have as yet seen no human activity in or about this prison but we know that these people will soon stir.

This much is done by the physical description alone and the physical description is only a small part of what Hawthorne has said. By association the prison takes on other connotations. It is associated with death and crime and like them seems ageless, as old as man. It is associated with the ugly weeds that mar the beauty of nature; as weeds are inharmonious with the order of nature so criminals are to the order of society. The prison is the "black flower" of civilized society.

These two: the physical description with its connotations and the overt associations go hand in hand to evoke an impression that is extremely varied and yet dominated by one tone which arises originally from one particular and individual prison.

We return to the metaphor of the black flower which crowned the association between the weed-plot and the prison to find that this metaphor also leads us on to another flower.

But on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to a prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him.

This rose-bush, by a strange chance, has been
kept alive in history; but whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness, so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally overshadowed it, or whether, as there is fair authority for believing, it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Anne Hutchinson, as she entered the prison door, we shall not take upon us to determine. Finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that inauspicious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers, and present it to the reader. It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow.¹

The prison as a black flower seems to be in sharp contrast to the wild rose at the threshold. The prison is the black flower of civilized society, the rose has the fragile beauty of nature untouched by civilization. The one is the instrument of punishment for crime, the other "might be imagined to offer its fragrance and fragile beauty to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the great heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him." But the two have likenesses as well as contrasts. For instance, both are flowers, both spring from the same soil and stand side by side in quiet harmony. We know the connotations of the prison. The rose too assumes symbolical connotations as soon as its beauty and fragrance become a token to the condemned criminal; a symbol of the great heart of nature that stands apart from and indifferent to human moral and statute law and can pity transgressors. The prison has sprung from the same virgin soil as this rose, the same

soil that produced the burdock and apple-peru. All three, associated variously with crime and rectification, civilized law and natural freedom, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, contrast one against the other and yet are similar and grow side by side in indifference and harmony. But Hawthorne does not leave the wild rose with only that connotation; he suggests that it may be a survivor from the wilderness or it may have sprung up at the feet of Anne Hutchinson, and he allows both ideas to stand with equal credibility. 1

Anne Hutchinson clashed with the oak and iron and thus adds to the connotations of the rose bush. The very fact that a saint emerges from the house of evil solidifies the impression of the whole complex association: that good can emerge from evil, that the beautiful and the ugly grow from

1 We must not fall into the natural error of discounting one suggestion because it is supernatural. Hawthorne wishes us to waive our rational prejudice and accept each. He says in the preface to The House of Seven Gables: "When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he been professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former—while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart—has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospheric medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the marvelous rather as a slight,
the same soil, and the more particular impression that perhaps there is evil in society, in law itself, when it condemns a saint. Hawthorne does not resolve these paradoxes; he allows them to rest on the imagination as he did the double suggestion of the origin of the rose bush, but he does add the impression that such paradoxes are universal in time. The rose bush continues in history tying the past to the present. It is a reassertion of the impression evoked by the seemingly ageless prison of the New World. It leaves us with a feeling of the immediacy of the past; crime is always with us and this rose, with all its connotations and paradoxes, continues through time irrespective of changes.

All of these implications, complexities, intricacies, and even more than we have mentioned are inherent in Hawthorne's short opening chapter. They could lead the reader into a terrible morass of intellectual speculation if it were not for the fact that we do not read carefully enough to become entirely embroiled in them, and since our memories
delicate, and evanescent flavor, than any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public. He can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime even if he disregard this caution." (Hawthorne, p.245.) It seems that an American audience is not willing to grant this license and Hawthorne restates his plea in the preface to the Blithedale: "In the old countries, with which fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded to the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every day probability, in view of the improved effects he is bound to produce thereby." (Hawthorne, p.439.).
cannot recall all we are more apt to respond emotionally to what we read. For this reason it is the tone, the feeling of the prison house that rides above all in our memories, a tone that is consistent, from the iron-studded door, to the beetle-browed front, the unsightly weed plot, the "black flower", the condemned criminal, to Hawthorne's final words that bring us back to the story: "It [the rose bush] may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening of a tale of human frailty and sorrow." This tone or feeling needs no logical understanding; it is imbibed emotionally; it evokes a particular mood that remains with the reader and easily absorbs the somber intellectual reflections. And the whole compendium finds an elan vital in a particular building, enriched and complicated but still the weather-stained, beetle-browed Puritan prison that stands behind a weed plot in early Boston.

With the beginning of the second chapter Hawthorne leaves the prison and turns our direct attention to the throng of people who stand before it. Because we have the physical description and the oblique references of the first chapter behind us Hawthorne is able to turn to these people with a greater degree of familiarity than before.

The grass plot before the jail, in Prison Lane on a certain summer morning, not less than two centuries ago, was occupied by a pretty large
large number of the inhabitants of Boston, all their eyes intently fastened on the iron clamped oaken door."

It is largely a repetition of the opening sentence but now Hawthorne can speak of "the inhabitants of Boston," "the grass-plot," "Prison Lane," and "the oaken door" knowing that his reader will accept them as familiar objects without question. As, in the first chapter, he left the presentation of the scene to speak less directly of the prison, he now follows the same pattern with the people.

Amongst any other population, or at a later period in the history of New England, the grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies of these good people would have augured some awful business in hand. It could have betokened nothing short of the anticipated execution of some noted culprit, on whom the sentence of a legal tribunal had been confirmed the verdict of public sentiment. But in that early severity of the Puritan character, an inference of this kind could not so indubitably be drawn. It might be that a sluggish bond-servant, or an undutiful child, whom his parents had given over to the civil authority, was to be corrected at the whipping post. It might be, that an Anti-nomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist was to be scourged out of the town, or an idle and vagrant Indian, whom the white men's fire-water had made riotous about the streets, was to be driven with stripes into the shadow of the forest. It might be, too, that a witch, like old Mistress Hibbins, the bitter tempered widow of the magistrate, was to die on the gallows. In either case, there was very much the same solemnity of demeanor on the part of the spectators, as befitted a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly inter-fused, that the mildest and severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful. Meagre, indeed, and cold was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for from such by-standers,

at the scaffold. On the other hand, a penalty, which, in our days, would infer a degree of mocking infamy and ridicule, might then be invested with almost as stern a dignity as the punishment of death itself.1

As Hawthorne used a few well chosen words to typify, to expose, the underlying, essential character of the prison, he describes this group of people in the same manner. Their bearded faces show a petrified, grim rigidity and they wear sad-colored garments and grey steeple-crowned hats. Again the language is evocative as well as descriptive and leaves with us a definite impression of the people who have built the prison with which we are familiar. It is language that describes essential moral character as well as exterior appearance and is consistent with the tone and feeling evoked by the first chapter.

The parallel pattern to the first chapter continues but now, instead of historical reference to add credibility, Hawthorne enumerates the varied punishments that these people inflict with uniform solemnity. The undutiful child, the witch and their particular punishments all reflect particular aspects of the Puritan character, yet all are consistent with the dominant tone set by Hawthorne's physical description. This suggestion of particular incidents adds credibility and life to the people for it puts action into their history. But Hawthorne's first concern is with the

primary motivating traits of the Puritans, and their attitude toward these wrong-doers reveals them: "...there was very much the same solemnity of demeanor on the part of these spectators; as befitted a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful." After placing the prison in time and space Hawthorne arrived at an expressive metaphor; now he concludes with an expository truth of character made poignant by the appearance and actions of the possessors. As a result the essential moral character of the Puritans stands out with extreme clarity because it is exposed by actions and not symbolical intricacies. We are moving nearer to dramatic action.

To return to our parallel between the chapters; the black flower was compared and contrasted to a wild rose. Now the stern and severe element of the Puritan character is contrasted with another basic trait.

The age had not so much refinement, that any sense of impropriety restrained the wearers of petticoat and farthingale from stepping forth into public ways, and wedging their not unsubstantial persons, if occasion were, into the throng nearest the scaffold at an execution. Morally as well as materially there was a coarser fiber in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding, than in their fair descendants, separated from them by a series of six or seven generations; for, throughout that chain of ancestry, every successive mother has transmitted to her child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slighter physical frame, if not a character of less force and solidity, than
her own. The women who were now standing about the prison-door stood within less than half a century of the period when the man-like Elizabeth had been the not altogether unsuitable representative of the sex. They were her countrywomen; and the beef and ale of their native land, with a moral diet not a whit more refined, entered largely into their composition. The bright morning sun, therefore shone on broad shoulders and well developed busts, and on round and ruddy cheeks, that had ripened in the far-off island, and had hardly yet grown paler or thinner in the atmosphere of New England.1

Contrary to what we have seen in the faces and the garb of these people, their bodies are accustomed to being well fed on beef and ale. They have broad shoulders, well developed busts, round and ruddy cheeks. Again Hawthorne uses physical characteristics to point up character, for these women who have assumed the stern and somber Puritan garb are countrywomen of the man-like Elizabeth from merry old England. They have been reared on beef and ale and "a moral diet not a whit more refined." The contrast between the two sides of their character is parallel to the contrast between the black flower and the rose. Those ruddy cheeks hearken to a time when religion and moral law were separated and life was less "civilized" (in the sense of the black flower of civilized society) and more natural. As years were to pass the thin air of New England (or the grimness of Puritan moral law) was to leave in each succeeding generation "a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty."

But on this summer morning the two basic elements of the Puritan character are at their height and both of these seemingly contrasting traits are forged into one character, almost as the black flower and the rose despite their differences seem one. But even as the element of pity from the great heart of nature was retained in the rose so an element of pity shyly lurks in Puritan society: "'Ah, but,' interposed, more softly, a youngwife, holding a child by the hand, 'let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will always be in her heart'."1. It is the Puritan strain, however, that is dominant and the temper of old England only seems to add to it a measure of coarseness, almost brutality. This result of such an amalgam becomes a startlingly apparent when the women speak.

There was, moreover, a boldness and rotundity of speech among these matrons, as most of them seemed to be, that would startle us at the present day, whether in respect to its purport or its volume of tone.

"Good wives," said a hard-featured dame of fifty, "I'll tell ye a piece of my mind. It would be greatly for the public behoof, if we women, being of mature age and church-members in good repute, should have the handling of such maids-factresses as this Hester Prynne. What think ye, gossips? If the hussy stood up for judgement before us five, that are now here in a knot together, would she come off with such a sentence as the worshipful magistrates have awarded? Marry, I trow not!"2.

"What do we talk of marks and brands, whether on the bodice of her gown, or the flesh of her

forehead?" cried another female, the ugliest as well as the most pitiless of these self-constituted judges. "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there no law for it? Truly, there is both in the Scripture and the statute book. Then let the magistrates, who have made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray!"

The England of beef and ale, of the man-like Elizabeth gives these women sanction to speak out with boldness and robustness for the enforcement of the Puritan law that reads alike in the Scripture and the statute book. If we were to carry the parallel construction of the first two chapters farther we might note that the capacity for pity that resides in the great heart of nature, and that we would expect in the parallel character of old England, has been forged into pitiless brutality by the oak and iron of Puritanism. This capacity for pity is gone from the Puritan matrons like the fading of the bloom in the cheeks of succeeding generations.

These people now step before us and speak and act. Hawthorne has quickly prepared the stage for them though his preparation has been so packed with meaning that we already are quite familiar with them. But in action, in conversation they take on a poignancy of life that the novelist can convey to us in no other manner.

At this point, then, let us review Hawthorne's preparation, to renew in our minds what he has shown us and to see where he is leading us.

A story, a novel, must be picked out of society. It is a particular chain of events snatched from the multitudinous parade of events that is the day-to-day life of a community. But this particular chain of events, involving particular people, must remain rooted in the community, in society, and cannot be separated out, for it is only as a piece of the whole social life that the story assumes meaning; it is only as members of society that the individuals become alive and real and take on meaning. Man is a social being—alone he is nothing; he dies, in society he becomes a man. The novelist deals only with the particular circumstances that are an essential part of his story; he cannot concern himself with the vast flow of life that is extraneous, and yet in the relation of those particular circumstances he must root his story and his people a part of their society. This is the primary problem that faces Hawthorne in these first few pages. His opening scene is only one circumstance in a busy community life, the circumstance that happens to be the beginning of his story, the circumstance by which he must convey the feeling of community life. He must portray the essential characteristics, the permanent disposition and tendencies, the tone and sentiment of the society. It is his method of doing this that we are about to review.

Hawthorne has moved from the general aspect and tone of the Puritan community and society to the actions of particular individuals in particular circumstances. In order
to make this progression clear let us arbitrarily divide the first two chapters from each other. In the first chapter he presents the community in the person of the prison; in the second, the inhabitants in the persons of the throng of people before the prison. This statement is too simple but we will find it excusable for the sake of clarity.

Hawthorne has told us nothing of the lay-out of the town of Boston; in fact, he has shown us only one building and very little of that one building so far as physical characteristics are concerned. We know nothing of the style of architecture of the type of construction; we do not know where it is situated in relation to the rest of the town. Hawthorne has chosen to portray the building by a few words that do form a picture in our minds, give the building credibility, but words whose primary intent is to evoke the feeling that the sight of the building would give us and at the same time evoke the feeling we would receive if we were to walk slowly and observantly through the entire community. It is a feeling of rough boards and weather-stains, of exposed nail heads with dark, rusty tails trailing beneath them on the hewn surface; the feeling of a new community hacked out of the wilderness. But this is not the primary impression that we receive nor the primary impression that Hawthorne wishes to convey. Our dominating impression is one of sternness, severity, starvation and gloom, for this
is a penal institution, gloomy, beetle-browed and ugly, constructed of oak and iron. Hawthorne deepens the impression by associating the prison with death, crime and evil—ageless and ubiquitous—and yet, somehow, also associated with and akin to that which is good and that which is beautiful. And in this manner he presents the community to us. He wishes to convey, not the surface but the permanent disposition and tendencies, the tone and sentiment of the society, and he does it with a prison and a few sparse words.

In the second chapter Hawthorne turns to the people who inhabit this community, have built it and fashioned it after their own image. Again the words of description are poignantly evocative and the impression we receive is much the same as that we received from the prison. Their garments and facial expressions are stern, severe and gloomy. But now we are moving nearer to people, to life, to action; and Hawthorne portrays them further by relating their actions, for actions give credibility and life to people. He deliberately chooses only actions that are connected with the punishment of crime, not only because these people are gathered to observe the ignominy of a prisoner but also because these actions strike in to and portray the basic disposition, the tone and sentiment of the society—"A people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused that the
mildest and the severest acts of public discipline were alike venerable and awful." But this is not the whole picture and Hawthorne, again, using physical description, evocative language and actions, conveys the coarse, robust element of their character. He fuses the two and is ready to poignantly display the result as the people come to life and speak.

While this impression, this understanding of Puritan society is working on our imaginations consciously and subconsciously, Hawthorne's very language is subconsciously fortifying and amplifying the same impression. It is language that shows a strong tie back to the Puritan logician, to the Mathers, Edwards and Bowdoin college. It seems "archaic and unreal."¹ His "way of describing nature, despite his sustained pattern of subdued colors is highly artificial. It makes you think of Yeats remark that whenever language has been 'the instrument of controversy,' it has inevitably grown abstract."² It is language in need of the renaissance that Emerson and Thoreau provide.

As we turn to specific examples we find that it is not the language we would expect from a "realistic" novelist who depends upon fidelity of detail for his effect. We find such phrases as "the grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies of these good people", "solemnity of demeanor", "rotundity of speech", and "this personage prefigured and

². Loc. Cit.
represented in his aspect.\(^1\) As Matthiessen has noted they seem "archaic and unreal." "Physiognomies", "demeanor", "rotundity", and "personage" are not the "precise word" that the modern novelist would use. They are the Latinisms of the Puritan logician, of Bowdoin college and of Mrs. Hawthorne and her Boston, but we are not so concerned with their source as their effect and that effect is not to embody a fullness of life but on the contrary a starvation, a severity of life. They are words from which the life has been bled by long use in logic and controversy and they are used to portray a community, a society in which the life blood, the old English virility has been perverted and is being drained by the combined force of Scriptural and statute law.

Within the limits forced upon him by his Puritan background and ancestry, however, Hawthorne's language is flexible and changes as the subject matter changes. As he turns to the virile, old English element of the Puritan character his language changes accordingly. Now he uses phrases like "beef and ale," "round and ruddy cheeks," and "that had ripened in a far-off island." "Beef," "ale", "ruddy," "cheeks," and "ripened" are Anglo-Saxon words, used to convey an Anglo-Saxon trait. They contain direct connotations that are rooted in the active life of man and nature. As Hawthorne's story moves towards action the connotations of his very words become more virile and active.

and finally as the people speak, their words, in themselves, reveal a coarse and brutal combination of the Puritan and the old English. We hear such phrases as "I'll tell ye a piece of my mind," "the haughty baggage," "Is there no law for it?" and "What do we talk of marks and brands, whether on the bodice of her gown, or the flesh of her forehead?... This woman has brought shame on us all, and ought to die." 1

In our attempt to show Hawthorne's sensitivity to the power of words we have perhaps made the case for his ability to convey life in language too convincing. We must remember that even when his language rises to its life-giving height ("The bright morning sun, therefore, shone on broad shoulders and well-developed busts, and on round and ruddy cheeks, that had ripened in the far-off island, and hardly yet grown paler or thinner in the atmosphere of New England") it still retains a note of the archaic and the unreal. Just as the Puritan element of character dominates the old English, the latinisms of Hawthorne's language hold sway over the influx of the Anglo-Saxon.

We have seen how Hawthorne moves from the general aspect of the Puritan society, to enlarge on the essential Puritan character and finally arrive at a particular action, the conversation of particular Puritans. He has shown us how these individuals are an integral part of and reflect the whole society. He has done all this while relating only

a single circumstance out of their busy community life, the particular circumstance that is the beginning of his story. At the same time he has never failed to keep paramount in our minds the fact that all of this introduction is only pointing to the single action that will set the story in motion. We are set on our guard in the very first sentence when we see that these people are assembled in front of the prison. Our eyes go to the door as Hawthorne uses it to typify and describe the building. Then, at the end of the first chapter he uses the rose to return our attention to the door: "finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that insus­ picious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers, and present it to the reader."

These two introductory chapters not only point to the commencement of the story but also prepare the reader for it. We have hints—from the prison itself, from the reference to the criminal and Anne Hutchinson, from the exposition of Puritan character through the exposition of criminal punish­ ments—that the person about to emerge from the door is a culprit of some sort. The reference to Anne Hutchinson and the particular interest of the women in the proceedings hints that this culprit might be a woman and finally the conversation of the female on-lookers confirms this, even gives us her name and hints at the nature of her crime. But even more
then this; Hawthorne has already instilled in us a certain amount of preconceived pity for this woman, again through the reference to Anne Hutchinson and through the rose as a token of the great heart of Nature. We might even feel that there is some good as well as evil inherent in her crime and its punishment because of the symbolical intricacies and interrelations of the black flower and the rose and because of Hawthorne's hope that the rose may serve "to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow." 1.

Returning to our pre-acquired feelings towards this woman, we already feel--through the stern attitude to all crime large and small, of the Puritans and the words of these women--some of the terror that will be constantly with her as a condemned member of such a society. Finally; with the added poignancy of speech our attention is turned once again to the door:

"Hush, now gossips! for the lock is turning in the prison-door, and here comes Mistress Prynne herself." 2.

The door is flung open in the first physical movement of the story. The movement rivets the attention of the crowd and the reader upon the doorway.

2. Ibid., p.113.
...there appeared in the first place, like a black shadow emerging into the sunshine, the grim and grisly presence of the town beadle, with a sword by his side and his staff of office in his hand.\(^1\)

This beadle has no personality; he is only a symbol, almost an allegorical figure for the whole of Puritan society. He

...prefigured and represented in his aspect the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law, which it was his business to administer in its final and closest application to the offender.\(^2\).

Again Hawthorne exploits physical appearance to the fullest extent. The beadle is dark and somber in appearance. He repeats the oak and iron of the prison and of the Puritan character in his staff of office and his sword. Bunyan would give him a name—Mr. Puritan Law— and note that Master Prynne is led from prison by Mr. Puritan Law. Hawthorne makes sure that we don’t miss such an allegorical interpretation but he adds something else to the beadle—he embodies him in a simile—the beadle is like a black shadow. As in the metaphor of the black flower the color is consistent with the feeling Hawthorne has given us, but the word "shadow," like the word "flower," jangles. Puritan law seems very tangible, hard and real while a shadow implies something intangible, soft and unreal. It suggests that perhaps Puritan law is not so obdurate as we might think. This law, alike in Scripture and statute book, has hidden in it some of the qualities not only of the flower but also of the shadow. The beadle, then, is

\(^1\)Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, p.115.  
\(^2\)loc. cit.
not only a simple allegorical representation of Puritan law
but he also adds something new to our impression of that law
and the society that enforces it. In doing so he reiterates
the impression that Hawthorne's symbolical intricacies have
already left with us—that Puritan law and Puritan society
are far too complex and intricate to be portrayed in a single
allegorical figure just as the stone front of a modern U.S.
post-office may reflect the general disposition of the people
who work within but it cannot show their whole personalities.
Hawthorne is far too wise to be an allegorist in this sense;
this is a truth that will come to us with ever-increasing
consciousness as we progress.

Just as there was a contrast to the black flower, just
as there was a contrast to the Puritan element in the Bos-
tonian character, now there steps forth a sharp contrast to
the beadle, who

Stretching forth the official staff in his left
hand, ... laid his right upon the shoulder of a
young woman, whom he thus drew forward; until,
on the threshold of the prison door, she repelled
him, by an action marked with natural dignity
and force of character, and stepped in to the
open air, as if by her own free will. She bore
in her arms a child, a baby of some three months
old, who winked and turned aside its little face
from the too vivid light of day; because its
existence, heretofore had brought acquainted only
with the grey twilight of a dungeon or other
darksome apartments of the prison.1.

All of the intricacies of association find a point of reference

in and give meaning to this woman and her child, yet she comes through as a particular individual with a particular personality, the one and only Hester Prynne.

When the young woman—the mother of this child—stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that thereby she might conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fashioned into her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and, with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townsmen and neighbors. On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread, appeared with letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony.  

The novelist has several methods available for presenting personality, bringing an individual to life, and Hawthorne uses most of them. The most poignant of these is, of course, the actions of the character as immediately as Hester Prynne steps before us her actions reveal the inner woman. She repelled the beadle “by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character, and stepped into the open air, as if by her own free will.”  

2. loc. cit.
hide the other "she took the baby on her arm, and, with a
burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that
would not be abashed, looked around at her townspople and
neighbors."

We see Hester also through the eyes of these townspople and neighbors and though neighbors are not often good
judges of character there is some truth lurking in what they
say:

"She hath good skill at her needle, that's certain,"
remarked one of her female spectators; "but did ever
a woman, before this brazen hussy, contrive such a
way of showing it? Why, gossips, what is it but to
laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make
a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemaent, meant
for punishment?"1

And from another point of view:

"Oh, peace, neighbors, peace!" whispered their
youngest companion; "do not let her hear you!
Not a stitch in that embroidered letter, but she
has felt it in her heart."2

Hawthorne also uses his prerogative of stepping inside the
mind of Hester to reveal thoughts that lie under her actions.

He mentions that the path Hester had to tread from the pri-
son door to the scaffold in the market-place where she was
to stand her punishment in open view was of no great length
but

Measured by the prisoner's experience...it might
be reckoned a journey of some length; for haughty
as her demeanor was, she perchance underwent an
agony from every footstep of those that thronged

2. loc. cit.
It was like a house-keeper or how she takes her eyes, and we
}

character of the 20th century novel. I do not know what she

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seen from the position:

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'veenity of those days! She appeared by a door-

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to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was

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manner with a sheen, and a face which, besides

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real existence on a large scale. She and dark and

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The young woman was tall, with a figure of per-

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soon. In our nature, however, there is a generation,

{a}

to see her, as it her heart had been flung into
But we have felt the essential traits of her personality. We can safely say that she is a proud woman, strong willed with a natural force of character, one who becomes haughty in defense against her accusers but at the same time retains a dignity and elegance that covers the pain and agony in her heart. As a proud woman she is deeply shamed by her ignominy and asserts her natural force of character to display a haughty glance that will not be abashed though it seems that her heart is being trampled under a thousand feet.

Again Hawthorne does not show us a multiplicity of surface details but, as with the community and its inhabitants, he is primarily concerned with making us feel the moral element in her character, the expression of moral purpose, or the permanent disposition and tendencies, the tone and sentiment of Hester’s personality.

This is Hester Prynne as we see her before us and as we see her through the eyes of others; Hester Prynne whose crime and punishment are the beginning of Hawthorne’s story; whose anguish, pride and force of character will be the primary moving forces in the events to follow.

But before we follow the story farther let us turn aside again to examine the intricacies of symbol and association that Hawthorne has carefully intermixed with his narrative. By means of these symbols and associations Hawthorne adds depth and meaning to the character of Hester.
He roots her solidly as an integral part of her community and society and defines her position as an outcast from that society, above and free from the Puritan law as a result of being condemned by that law. Hawthorne exemplifies and expands the ambiguity of her situation in a variety of ways.

To return to the beadle as allegorical figure; as Hester steps from the prison door she repels Mr. Puritan Law and asserts her freedom. It is, however, an empty act, for in this society which treats the smallest of crimes with the same seriousness as the largest Hester is condemned both temporally and spiritually, so far as the Puritans are concerned, and her heart is being trampled upon in the street. Her action only demonstrates her pride and force of character, her: 'You can't fire me, I quit', attitude.

In the parallel pattern of the narrative Hester follows after the beadle as the rose does the black flower and she now stands outside and above the laws of man like the rose as a symbol of the great heart of Nature. Moreover, the likeness between Hester and Anne Hutchinson is difficult to miss: both are condemned by the Puritans, both are women and both now enjoy the freedom of the rose.

This impression of Hester outside and free from the Puritan law is picked up and repeated in her attire, which was of a splendor "in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations
of the colony." And then there is the scarlet letter A on her breast, "so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel she wore.... It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself."

On the other side, however, Anne Hutchinson was once a Puritan, we found the rose to be strangely akin to the black flower and Hester, too, cannot really extricate herself from her Puritan breeding. In fact, the dominant element of Hester's character is the same as that of the manlike Elizabeth and her proud and robust subjects. That essential old English virility that is subjugated under Puritan law in the Bostonian character has broken free in Hester and though she owes what she is to these Puritans she remains different.

Hester, then, is cast into the ambiguous position of an outcast from society, ambiguous because no man, or woman, can ever sever himself from society and remain a man. Hester will find herself no different.

If we wish to continue the point we can even find a parallel between the two sides of Hester's ambiguous situation and the two most active elements of her character, anguish and pride—the one a prolonged emotion, the other an
inheritance from her fathers. Parallel to the fact that she can never sever herself from the society that has bred her to be the woman that she is, is her anguish that will become an agonizing longing to reconcile herself to that society and take her place once again as a social being; and parallel to the fact that for all practical purposes she is condemned and an outcast is her pride that will ultimately lead her to renounce her society and attempt to escape from it. But that is far ahead of the story. At the moment Hawthorne only presents the ambiguity of her situation and hints at the problems it will bring to Hester as her involvement in the situation deepens.

There is, however, something else important that Hawthorne wishes to say about Hester. To pick up the thread we will return once again to the association of Hester with Anne Hutchinson and the rose. Anne Hutchinson emerged from the Boston prison a saint. Despite, or perhaps because of, the ugly taint of crime upon her (for dissent was a crime among the Puritans) she is enwreathed in the beauty of sainthood. As she passed over the threshold there grew up at her feet a beautiful rosebush, a rosebush also tainted with the ugly by way of Anne and directly associated with the ugly black flower on the threshold of which it grows. The whole story is a poetic expression of the truth that the beautiful exists because the ugly exists, good exists because evil
exists and the two (four) are so tightly entwined that they are not entirely separable, at least by man. Hester Prynne is associated with this poetic expression and we see the theme repeated as Hester, tainted by her crime, emerges from the prison in all her beauty, her "dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and her ... face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was lady-like, too,... And never had Hester Prynne appeared more lady-like, in the antique interpretation of the term, than as she issued from the prison."1. Her ignominy actually seems to enrich her beauty:

Those who had known her, and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped.2.

Hester too, is saint-like in her beauty. Now the theme reaches a climax in one of the most delicately presented and most beautifully poetic passages in all Hawthorne. We will not tarnish it by any meagre words of explanation. As Hester stands revealed on the ugly scaffold, the child of sin in her arms, Hawthorne says:

Had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman, so

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2. Ibid., p.116.
picturesque in her attire and mien, and with the infant at her bosom, an object to remind him of the image of Divine Maternity, which so many illustrious painters have vied with one another to represent; something which should remind him, indeed, but only by contrast, of that sacred image of sinless motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world. Here, there was the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such an effect, that the world was only the darker for this woman's beauty, and the more lost for the infant she had borne.

We began this digression into the less direct things that Hawthorne has to say about Hester after examining the scene and environment which Hawthorne presented in a few sparse but evocative words that pointed up his primary concern with the essential moral tone of the society, the permanent disposition and tendency of the society that lies under outward appearances. From thence we went on to show that on the individual level (Hester), Hawthorne's concern was much the same, only modified to make the individual come to life and stand out clearly from the whole society.

In terms of structure we have shown how Hawthorne, concerned only with a particular sequence of events extracted from the whole life of the community, must present the community and the individual and at the same time establish the individual as an integral part of society while relating the few events that concern him. Our most recent digression has pointed out how Hawthorne, so early in his story, has gone a long way towards establishing this relationship, towards

1. Hawthorne, op. cit., p.117.
rooting his story in society and at the same time has poetically painted the intricate and universal moral meaning and significance of the story he has chosen.

Having examined the essential character of Hester and her Puritan society as well as the relation between them we will turn to the situation as Hawthorne develops it in order to keep it clear in our minds and prepare us for the events to follow.

Hester was led by the beadle from the prison to a scaffold on the western edge of the market-place and directly under the eaves of Boston's first church. It was the platform of the pillory.

In Hester Prynne's instance, however, as not infrequently in other cases, her sentence bore, that she should stand a certain time upon the platform, but without undergoing that grip of the neck and confinement of the head, the prone-ness to which was the most devilish characteristic of this ugly engine.  

In addition Hester must wear the scarlet letter upon her breast for the remainder of her years.

Knowing well her part, she ascended a flight of wooden steps, and was thus displayed to the surrounding multitude, at about the height of a man's shoulders above the street.

Standing there under "the heavy weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes" reality slipped from before her eyes and her mind, especially her memory roamed back over her life, bringing up other scenes than this rough-hewn village.

1. Hawthorne, op. cit. p.117.
2. loc. cit.
3. Ibid., p.118.
Possibly, it was an instinctive device of her spirit, to relieve itself, by the exhibition of these phantasmagoric forms, from the cruel weight and hardness of the reality.

Be that as it might, the scaffold of the pillory was a point of view that revealed to Hester Prynne the entire track along which she had been treading since her happy infancy.¹

These reminiscences center in her paternal home in England and finally evolve to "another countenance, of a man well stricken in years, a pale, thin, scholar-like visage, with eyes dim and bleared by the lamplight that had served them to pore over many ponderous books."²

Next rose before her in memory's picture gallery, the intricate and narrow thoroughfares, the tall, grey houses, the huge cathedrals, and the public edifices, ancient in date and quaint in architecture, of a Continental city; where a new life had awaited her, still in connection with the misshapen scholar; a new life, but feeding itself on time-worn materials, like a tuft of green moss on a tumbling wall. Lastly, in lieu of these shifting scenes, came back the rude market-place of the Puritan settlement, with all the townspeople assembled and leveling their stern regards at Hester Prynne....³

Hester is now recalled from her intense consciousness of being the object of all these intent eyes by discerning a familiar face and figure on the outskirts of the crowd.

Hawthorne first describes the man as "small in stature, with a furrowed visage, which, as yet, could hardly be termed aged. There was a remarkable intelligence in his features, as of a person who had so cultivated his mental part that it could

¹ Hawthorne, op. cit., p.118.
² Ibid., pp.119.
³ Iloc. cit.
not fail to mould the physical to itself, and become mani-
fest by unmistakable tokens.1 Hester

Again, at the first instance of perceiving that
thin visage, and the slight deformity of the fig-
ure,...pressed her infant to her bosom with so
convulsive a force that the poor babe uttered
another cry of pain.2

The stranger, for he has just arrived in Boston, at first
gives Hester only a glance but then the recognition becomes
mutual.

....his look became keen and penetrative. A
writhing horror twisted itself across his fea-
tures, like a snake gliding swiftly over them
and making one little pause, with all its wreath-
thed intervolutions in sight. His face darkened
with some powerful emotion, which, never-the-less,
he so instantaneously controlled by an effort of his
will, that, save at a single moment, its expres-
sion might have passed for calmness.3

He turns to the nearest townsmen and inquires as to the mean-
ing of the public ignominy of Hester and now the townsman puts
in direct words the story that up to now the reader has had
to infer from Hawthorne's implications.

Hester is the wife of a learned Englishman who has
long dwelt in Amsterdam, whence he determined to remove to
New England and sent his young wife ahead. He has not ap-
ppeared in the two years that have followed and Hester has
been left to her own misguidance. The identity of the baby's
father, however, remains a mystery. The magistrates, now

2. Ibid., p.120.
3. loc.cit.
thinking that Hester's husband must be on the bottom of the
sea, have seen fit to pass a judgement on her.

"The penalty thereof is death. But in their
great mercy and tenderness of heart, they have
doomed Mistress Prynne to stand only a space
of three hours on the platform of the pillory,
and then and thereafter, for the remainder of
her natural life, to wear a mark of shame upon
her bosom."

"A wise sentence!" remarked the stranger,
gravely bowing his head. "Thus she will be a
living sermon against sin, until the ignomi-
nious letter be engraved upon her tombstone.
It irks me, neverthe less, that the partner
of her iniquity should not, at least, stand on
the scaffold by her side. But he will be known!
--he will be known! --he will be known!"1

Hester, horror stricken by the sight of the stranger,
that she recognizes so surely, was, however,
conscious of a shelter in the presence of these
thousand witnesses. It was better to stand
thus with so many betwixt him and her, than to
greet him, face to face, they two alone.2

After all of Hawthorne's varied hints at the nature of
the situation, it now stands clearly before us. This use
of hints, insinuations and associations that point towards
the action and at the same time enlarge on its depths and
meaning, followed by the overt action itself, is a method
that we will find consistent throughout the novel. We
have seen it in the presentation of Hester, and of the
Puritan character in general: a narrative and poetic ex-
position followed by a view of these Puritans standing

1. Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 121.
2. loc. cit.
before us and speaking words that bring them to life and vividly show them to be all that Hawthorne has intimated.

Along the same track of observation it is difficult to say when we, as readers, become specifically conscious that this stranger is the husband of Hester. The overt action that reveals this fact does not appear until the following chapter but already we know and Hawthorne expects us to know for there will be other things of more importance for us to notice when that time comes.

We receive our first hint when we find that the physical appearance of this stranger is much the same as that of the man in Hester’s reverie. This is followed quickly by the great shock of horror in recognition registered by each of them. By the time that he has made his inquiries, expressing his determination that the father of the child shall be known and Hester has become conscious of her shelter in the crowd, we know, though Hawthorne has not yet directly stated the fact in any way.

As was the case with Hester, the first appearance of this man reveals to us a great deal about his essential character. We see character in his physical appearance, which, as usual with Hawthorne, reveals the inner man. He has the bleared eyes of a scholar, “Yet those same bleared optics had a strange, penetrating power, when it was their owner’s purpose to read the human soul.” He is capable of deep emotion but possesses a strong will that can cover his
face with a mask that reveals nothing of what lies underneath. Here also we see Hawthorne's first use of an animal simile in description. The simile not only makes the depth and nature of the stranger's emotion more poignant but also intensifies our impression of his will that can so completely control such an emotion. Following Hawthorne's usual pattern, our preconceptions of the stranger's character are now vividly illustrated in his actions. We see him courteously and formally question the townsman about Hester, never revealing his intimate and deeply emotional involvement in the situation. We see and feel his utter, inflamed determination, to know the father of this baby that will determine his role in the story and eventually make a monomaniac of him.

Hawthorne continues to lay the situation as a voice calls to Hester from the balcony of the church that overlooks the platform on which she stands. It is the voice of John Wilson, a great scholar and the eldest clergyman of Boston. With him on the balcony are Governor Bellingham, Arthur Chillingworth, Hester's young pastor, and a guard of honor. Wilson says that he has asked the young clergyman to speak to Hester, here in public, that she might reveal the name of her partner in sin. The young man declines, however, until the governor himself steps forward to say:

"... the responsibility of this woman's soul lies greatly with you. It behooves you, therefore, to exhort her to repentance, and to confession, as a
proof and consequence thereof."\(^1\)
The directness of the appeal from such a high source turns our eyes towards the young man and he steps forward and after a pause to bow his head as if in prayer, his lips trembling, he begins to speak.

"Hester Prynne," said he, looking over the balcony and looking down steadfastly into her eyes, "thou hearest what this good man says, and seest the accountability under which I labor. If thou feel-est it to be for thy soul's peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation, I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer! Be not silent for any mistaken pity and tenderness for him; for, believe me, Hester, though he were able to step down from a high place, and stand there beside thee, on thy pedestal of shame, yet better were it so, than to hide a guilty heart through life. What can thy silence do for him, except it tempt him—yea, compel him, as it were—to add hypocrisy to sin? Heaven hath granted thee an open ignominy, that thereby thou mayest work out an open triumph over the evil within thee, and the sorrow without. Take heed how thou denyest to him—who, perchance, hath not the courage to grasp it for himself—the bitter, but wholesome, cup that is now presented to thy lips!"

The young pastor's voice was tremulously sweet, rich, deep, and broken. The feeling that it so evidently manifested, rather than the direct purport of the words, caused it to vibrate within all hearts, and brought the listeners into one accord of sympathy. Even the poor baby, at Hester's bosom, was affected by the same influence; for it directed its hitherto vacant gaze towards Mr. Dimmesdale, and held up its little arms, with a half-pleased, half-plaintive murmur.

...Hester shook her head.\(^2\)

The Reverend Wilson cries out to her to

\(^1\) Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 125.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 124.
"Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast."

"Never!" replied Hester Prynne, looking, not at Mr. Wilson, but into the deep and troubled eyes of the younger clergyman. "It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine!"

"Speak woman!" said another voice, coldly and sternly, proceeding from the crowd about the scaffold. "Speak and give thy child a father!"

"I will not speak!" answered Hester, turning pale as death, but responding to his voice, which she too surely recognized. "And my child must seek a heavenly father; she shall never know an earthly one!"

"She will not speak!" murmured Mr. Dimesdale, who, leaning over the balcony, with his hand on his heart, had awaited the result of his appeal. He now drew back with a long expiration. "Wonderous strength and generosity of a woman's heart! She will not speak!"

After a verbose sermon by Mr. Wilson, of which Hester is the text, she is led, in a half-frenzied state of nervous excitement, back to the prison and the oak and iron door closed behind her like the curtain falling on the end of the act.

Before we summarize this first scene as a whole let us take a closer look at the action that has most recently transpired. We are introduced to a third character who, because of the extent to which Hawthorne deals with him, we know to be also intimately concerned with the situation. Again Hawthorne describes appearance before he allows the character to come to life and reveal himself in action.

He had

....come from one of the great English universities, bringing all the learning of the age into our wild forest-land. His eloquence and religious fervor had already given the earnest of high eminence in his profession. He was a person of very striking aspect, with a white, lofty, and impending brow, large, brown, melancholy eyes, and a mouth which, unless when he forcibly compressed it, was apt to be tremulous, expressing both nervous sensibility and a vast power of self-restraint. Not withstanding his high native gifts and scholar-like attainments, there was an air about this young minister,—an apprehensive, a startled, a half-frightened look,—as of a being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss in the pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own.

Hawthorne points out his religious fervor and his deep introversion, his nervous sensibility, but vast power of restraint. Again the physical description tallies; the deep brown eyes, the tremulous lips, the impending brow emphasise each basic trait of his character in turn. But even when Arthur speaks, when he comes to life, he does not seem to possess the poignancy of felt life that Hester and the stranger do because we do not feel that he is intimately involved in the situation, that he is speaking and acting from the depth of his heart. When we know, however, that Arthur Dimmesdale is the long-sought father of Hester's child, he come to life for we see him in reference to the situation. Then we feel the great depth of his anguish when he pleads with Hester to speak, for

her silence can only tempt him, and he does not have the
courage to speak for himself. In addition the dramatic
irony of the situation intensifies our feeling. True, there
are hints at Arthur's involvement in the situation; in the
first place, from the very amount of detail that Hawthorne
uses to present him, and from the guarded pleas to Hester
in his speech, and finally from his final relief when she
will not reveal him. Most overtly we see it as the tiny
baby reaches out her arms to him and though Hawthorne covers
the act by appealing to the power of Arthur's speech the de­
vice remains as an example of Hawthorne's use of hint and
association in its most barren and glaring state. Such a
glaring lack of subtlety in this one case, however, does
serve to illustrate his more successful use of the same de­
vices. The method remains the same but when successfully
used it is more subtle and contains more depths of meanings.

Finally we must mention that the last action of this
first scene is a neat epitome in action of the basic situ­
ation as it affects the three people most intimately involved.
Hester will not speak, the stranger does not know the answer
to Mr. Wilson's question and, in his weakness, Arthur can
only feel relief that his secret is safe.

* * * * *

We have presented these first few chapters of The
Scarlet Letter in considerable detail. We have, in fact,
strayed from a strict examination of the structure in order to show many (certainly not all) of the ways in which Hawthorne presents his situation and develops his story. We have found that such an examination, even of the first few pages, leads us into a great intricacy of thought and emotion. We have felt it necessary to explore this intricacy of detail for we cannot truly understand the full meaning of the story until we see the depths of meaning that lie under it. Each of our digressions, therefore, has been made in order to point one of Hawthorne's methods of creating and integrating these underlying subtleties. Our purpose in this thesis, then, is to present a particular approach to the structural form that will aid the reader to see that structural form more clearly and to aid him in seeing the relevance and extreme importance of the intricacies that underlie. We have now enough evidence in hand to present our particular approach.

We have noted that Hawthorne's characters are not the same as the characters we find in the modern novel. They have no breadth of personality, they are not rounded individuals. We must remember, however, that Hester, Arthur and the stranger could be no different for they are intimately and completely involved in a situation that they must face with a supreme effort of their entire being. All men, under such conditions, fall back upon the primal and essential traits of their characters for in these traits lies
their deepest trust in themselves. When we observe people acting under such duress we see revealed their permanent moral dispositions and tendencies, their essential tone and sentiment. We ordinarily encounter such characters in the drama, for the short running length of the drama demands such intense involvement in order to achieve magnitude of theme and for the purely practical reason that the drama does not provide the physical space for the expansion of character. We find Hawthorne using, in a novel, the type of character that ordinarily we would find only in the drama. But the parallels between The Scarlet Letter and the drama do not end here. Hawthorne's scenes are bare like those of the Elizabethan or the Classical stage. Again Hawthorne is primarily concerned with the essential truth of character that lies under appearance. We do not see the superficial aspect of Puritan society but the essential tone and sentiment that lies under all appearances.

Then Hawthorne places Hester Prynne upon a platform, a virtual stage on which to act out her drama. Above her is the Elizabethan balcony and before her, on a lower level, stands the chorus of women of the town who comment on the action and thus reveal the nature of the community they represent. We might even visualize their comments as a strophe of condemnation of Hester and an anti-strophe of pity for her plight.

In this connection we know that the novelist
instinctively sees the chief turns and phases of his story expressed in the form of a thing acted where narrative ceases and a direct light falls upon his people and their doings. It must be so, for it is the sharpest effect within his range; and the story must naturally have the benefit of it, whenever the emphasis is to fall most strongly. To the scene, therefore, all other effects will appear to be subordinated in general; and the placing of the scenes in the story will be the prime concern.

This is true of every novelist but in the case of Hawthorne and The Scarlet Letter we find the truth of the statement intensified. Hawthorne does not use an abundance of action and this fact alone intensifies the impact and importance of the action that he does present. In addition, he so carefully and intricately prepares for each action that the intensity of the action rises to an extreme pitch, a pitch that is difficult to attain even in the drama. Each word; each gesture, each movement holds a world of meaning.

The primary purpose of our first chapter has been to show how and why Hawthorne's action rises to such intensity and to show in some detail how the narrative is subservient to the action. In short, we have attempted to prove that Hawthorne's primary structural element is his action and that if we read with this in mind we will find it a definite aid to our understanding and appreciation of the novel. Let us summarize, then, what we have found in order to see how our theory holds in actual reading.

Hawthorne began by placing a scene before our eyes, a social scene, a picture of the people of a community, people trapped in one community action. But before he allowed this scene to come to life he carefully prepared us for the action to follow. This scene consisted of one building with a throng of people standing before it, but instead of filling in the details of the picture as preparation for the action, Hawthorne chose to use only a few outstanding characteristics that would convey to us, not the whole flow of community life, but the essential and underlying moral tone and sentiment of the society. He is not so much concerned with the fact that these people hanged witches and whipped their bond-servants (although he mentions these things in order to add life to his portrayal) as he is with the essential nature and character of the people who perpetuate such action. He finds two essential elements in their characters that contribute the most to making them what they are,—an old Anglo-Saxon coarse and hard virility that is tempered and directed by a harsh and completely revered combination of spiritual and temporal law.

The few outstanding characteristics which Hawthorne chooses to portray such a society evoke a feeling of somberness and severity, of the starvation of all else to the benefit of this law. The very words he uses, in themselves, echo and add to the impression evoked and yet are
flexible enough to cover both of the essential elements in the Puritan character. Thus Hawthorne evokes the emotional feeling that we would have if we were present in the society and at the same time gives us some understanding of why we have this particular reaction. However, if Hawthorne were to leave it at this the emotional stream would have a hard time of it, and become submerged under the intellectual level that he has provided to give depth to the story. He has restored the emotional level to pre-eminence by placing a group of these people before us and allowing us to see them in action. The result is that the reader observes these people with the same intensity of attention that one manifests on any particularly interesting person whom one has heard a great deal about and whom one is meeting for the first time.

There is one other important element that aids to pack and intensify the action that we will do well to mention. It is Hawthorne's use of irony. We have already noted the dramatic irony in the scene between Hester and Arthur, but another example will help us to see the great extent to which Hawthorne uses the device. After he has carefully cast doubt on the untainted righteousness of the Puritan law by his reference to the prosecution of the "sainted" Anne Hutchinson and in the inference embodied in the prison, the black flower and the beadle he ironically has a member of the chorus of women say:
"Why, gossips, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment."

The irony in the statement points to the previous inferences we mentioned and at the same time the statement itself reveals the narrow minds and blind acceptance of authority of the Puritans. But despite the depth of meaning in the conversation of these women they are only a chorus whose job is to comment on the action and portray the community,—its attitude and its character,—to serve as the living connection between the particular events of the story and the whole community life. All that precedes points carefully to the entrance of Hester Prynne and the beginning of the action. We have shown how Hawthorne prepared the way for Hester's actions by illuminating her character through associations with Anne Hutchinson, the man-like Elizabeth, and the wild rose. While this group of associations was leading to our impression of Hester's essential character in her rejection of the beadle and subsequent actions, the same group of associations, assisted by the chorus, was explaining the situation, which explanation, in turn, gives Hester's actions added significance. We have even preconceived the terror in her situation through the vicious remarks of the chorus. We have noted the same to be true of the entrances of the stranger and Arthur Dimmesdale and we

have had all of these feelings intensified by Hawthorne's use of irony so that when the drama on the stage/scaffold unfolds it is loaded with poignancy and intensity of meaning.

Finally, Hawthorne is not content to let the situation speak for itself on the level of ideal truth. He must enlarge on the universal implications of these particular people trapped in this particular situation by means of the device of association. Thus he underlines and expands the ambiguity of Hester's position as an outcast from society,—her revolt against the society that has cast her out and her great need for reconciliation in order to become truly a woman in the full sense of the word. At the same time he points the intricate confusion of good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly that is inherent in the situation. Thus he has adopted a situation that has intensity in itself because it demands the utmost of human strength and human character from the participants and he adds to the intensity and magnitude by symbol and association while at the same time he roots the action in society and casts it on a universal scale. Despite this, however, there have been strong objections to Hawthorne's method because,

In the light of a full understanding of the role of the realistic novelist, most critics, in regretting that Hawthorne was not a Fielding or a Balzac, have believed that he failed to come to grips with the life of his age by not portraying such concrete facts as he encountered as an inspector of the docks. But it is his art was to fulfill its function by remaining true to what his deepest intuitions had
known there must inevitably have been woven into the texture of his style some thinness and bleakness, the consequences of the long domination of Puritan thought, and the lack of feverish activity of America around him, there was not the social solidity that Fielding knew or the manifold gradations between classes that Balzac could analyze. The frequent disproportion between the weight of what Hawthorne wanted to say and the flimsiness of the vehicle he could devise to carry it suggests the nature of the problem to be set by a man of his time who was not content with taking over conclusions from Europe, but was determined to grasp the usable truth, the actual meaning of civilization as it had existed in America. What Eliot called Hawthorne's 'realism' could not depend on a notation of rich surface details; its very starvation made it a truer facing of the tragedy of provincial New England.

In *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne found a vehicle of the necessary magnitude but in order to invest that vehicle with depth and meaning he, of necessity, forsook richness of surface detail for richness of symbol, association and innuendo. Then to preserve the illusion of felt life he heightened and intensified the action and borrowed the bare stage of the Elizabethan and classical drama, thus emphasising both the inherent magnitude and intensity of the story and the bareness and bleakness of provincial New England society.

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CHAPTER II

With our close examination of the first scene in mind and with an eye particularly to Hawthorne's method of building structural form we can go on to examine the use of his chief structural element, the action presented as on a stage. We will, however, take occasional side glances to note how the other elements aid to establish magnitude and intensity.

We have found that the beginning of Hawthorne's story brought together all of the essential characters (Hester, Arthur, the stranger and little Pearl) on the stage/scaffold in the market-place. We shall find that the central and essential turn (middle) of the story will return all of them to this stage, as will the final denouement or end, while less important but essential turns will also be presented in the form of something acted only on a smaller stage and generally involving fewer characters.

Our second chapter will deal with the second scene on the scaffold plus the narrative and lesser actions that prepare for that scene. Since the purpose of our thesis is to approach the structural form we will be primarily concerned with the actions and how each adds to the development of the
story or plot. Since this, by no means, can give anything like a complete picture of the novel we have felt it necessary to treat the first scene in considerable detail so that we can preserve some idea of the whole, of which the action is only a part, even if the essential part.

Hawthorne has accomplished a great deal in his opening scene, one of the most notable things being the competent background, as an integral part of the story. He has, it is true, used the equivalent of a chorus but that chorus plays an important part in the course of the action. He has not needed to call in a Bernardo and a Francisco who have no part in the situation. There are, however, a few elements of the situation that need more clarification, particularly the past history of Hester and her husband and the reasons for the stranger's overly emphatic statement that the father of the child will be known. To fill these holes and set the plot in motion Hawthorne follows the opening scene with another, lesser scene that takes place inside the prison.

After Hester's return to the prison both she and the baby were in a state of extreme nervous excitement as a result of their ordeal. The jailer saw fit to introduce a physician as the only possible means of quelling her frenzied insubordination.

Closely following the jailer into the dismal apartment appeared that individual, of singular aspect, whose presence in the crowd had been of such deep interest to the wearer of the scarlet letter. He was lodged in the prison, not as
suspected of any offence, but as the most convenient and suitable mode of disposing of him until the magistrates should have conferred with the Indian sagamores respecting his reason. His name was announced as Roger Chillingworth. The jailer, after ushering him into the room, remained a moment, marvelling at the comparative quiet that followed his entrance; for Hester Prynne had immediately become as still as death although the child continued to moan.¹⁴

The physician administers a potion that quiets the baby and then does the same for Hester, who fears that he wishes to take his revenge on her. However, he reassures her.

"We have wronged each other," answered he. "Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay. Therefore, as a man who has not thought and philosophized in vain, I seek no vengeance, plot no evil against thee. Between thee and me, the scale hangs fairly balanced. But, Hester, the man lives who has wronged us both! Who is he?"

"Ask me not!" replied Hester Prynne, looking firmly into his face. "That thou shalt never know!"

"Never, sayest thou?" rejoined he, with a smile of dark and self-relying intelligence.... I shall seek this man, as I have sought truth in books; as I have sought gold in alchemy. There is a sympathy that will make me conscious of him. I shall see him tremble. I shall see myself shudder suddenly and unawares. Sooner or later, he mustneeds be mine!²³

"Yet fear not for him! Think not that I shall interfere with Heaven's own method of retribution or, to my own loss, betray him to the grasp of human law. Neither do thou imagine that I shall contrive aught against his life; no, nor against his fame, if, as I judge, he be a man of fair repute. Let him live! Let him hide himself in outward honor, if he may! Not the less he shall be mine!"³

². Ibid., p.128.
³. Ibid., pp.128-9.
But Roger Chillingworth must do his work in secret; he insists that Hester must never reveal his true identity.

"It may be he explained because I will not encounter the dishonor that besmirches the husband of a faithless woman. It may be for other reasons. Enough, it is my purpose to live and die unknown. Let, therefore, thy husband be to the world as one already dead, and of whom no tidings shall ever come. Recognize me not, by word, by sign, by look! Breathe not the secret, above all, to the man thou wittest of. Shouldst thou fail me in this, beware! His fame, his position, his life will be in my hands. Beware!"

"I will keep thy secret, as I have his," said Hester.

"Swear it!" rejoined he.

And she took the oath.

Hester is still too stunned by her experience to take any cognizance of the implications of her oath, and in addition she feels that she is now free, done with any moral responsibility to others. This is no concern of hers. The leech, on the other hand, has voluntarily taken a new name, renounced moral responsibility, all duty to others or to his community, in order to devote himself entirely to one purpose, that of being judge, jury and executioner for the paramour of Hester Prynne. It is a supreme act of human pride. In the classical drama it would be an act of hubris that could lead only to destruction.

Hester is soon released from her confinement and goes with her little daughter to take up a solitary life in a small cabin apart from the settlement. Roger Chillingworth

finds a residence in the home of the young minister, who
lived alone and had room for a companion, who was virtually
the only man Roger Chillingworth could term an intellectual
equal and who, because of his failing health, was much in
need of the services of a physician.

The life of the community returns to its normal course
and it is several years before there is any further contact,
other than a glance on the street, between Hester and the two
men that have played such an important part in her life.
However, as little Pearl is approaching the age at which all
little Puritan children are being instructed in the Catechism
there arises some question among the magistrates as to whe­
ther she should be allowed to remain with her mother. Some
word of this, of course, reaches Hester and she being of the
character and temperament we have observed determines to go
immediately to the governor himself to plead her case. She
finds him with the Reverend Wilson, Arthur Dimmesdale and
the old physician. Governor Bellingham come to the point
almost at once.

"Hester Prynne," said he, fixing his naturally
stern regard on the wearer of the scarlet letter,
"there hath been much question concerning thee of
late. The point hath been weighily discussed,
whether we, that are of authority and influence,
do well discharge our consciences by trusting an
immortal soul, such as there is in yonder child,
to the guidance of one who has stumbled and fallen,
said the pitfall of this world. Speak thou, the
child's own mother! Were it not, thinkest thou,
for thy little one's temporal and eternal welfare
that she be taken out of thy charge and cold
soberly, and disciplined strictly, and instructed in the truths of heaven and earth? What canst thou do for the child, in this kind?1.

Hester pleads that she can teach little Pearl what she has learned from the scarlet letter:

"....this badge hath taught me—it daily teaches me—it is teaching me at this moment—lessons whereof my child may be wiser and better, albeit they can profit nothing to myself."2.

Nevertheless, the magistrates deem it necessary to examine Pearl in order to determine her knowledge of Puritan doctrine, but she, being an unpredictable and capricious child, refuses to speak and when she does she gives an ungracious and fanciful answer that spalls the questioners. The answer comes not from any ignorance on the part of the child but from her mischievousness.

Despite her distress Hester is diverted and startled by the appearance of the physician for a change had come over his features,—how much uglier they were,—how his dark complexion seemed to have grown duskier, and his figure more misshapen,—since the days when she had familiarly known him. She met his eyes for an instant but was immediately constrained to give all her attention to the scene now going forward.3

The Governor, recovering from his astonishment at Pearl's answer, feels that no further inquiry need be made; the child must be rescued from Satan at once. Hester, however, claps the child in her arms and defiantly faces the magistrates.

2. Ibid., p.149.
3. Ibid., p.150.
"God gave me the child!" cried she. "He gave her in requital of all things else, which ye have taken from me. She is my happiness—he is my torture, none the less! Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me too! See ye not, she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved and so endowed with a million-fold the power of retribution for my sin? Ye shall not take her! I will die first!"¹.

In her desperation she turns to the young pastor Dimmesdale and demands that he plead for her.

"Speak thou for me!" cried she. "Thou wast my pastor, and hadst charge of my soul, and knowest me better than these men can. I will not lose the child! Speak for me! Thou knowest—for thou hast sympathies which these men lack!...².

And the young minister, at once, comes forward

...pale, and holding his head over his heart, as was his custom whenever his peculiarly nervous temperament was thrown into agitation. He looked now more careworn and emaciated than we described him at the scene of Hester's ignominy; and whether it were his failing health, or whatever the cause might be, his large dark eyes had a world of pain in their troubled and melancholy depth.³.

He speaks carefully and wisely for Hester and with such sincerity that he causes the physician to remark:

"You speak, my friend, with a strange earnestness..."⁴.

The minister's plea follows the arguments of Hester's outburst and is successful in winning the governor to Hester's cause, wherewith she leaves the house but not before a few interesting remarks are exchanged by Roger Chillingworth and the Reverend Wilson.

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¹. Hawthorne, op.cit., p.150.
². loc.cit.
³. ibid., pp.150-1.
⁴. ibid., p.151.
"A strange child!" remarked old Roger Chillingworth. "It is easy to see the mother's part in her. Would it be beyond a philosopher's reach, think ye, gentlemen, to analyze the child's nature, and, from its make and mould to give a shrewd guess at the father?"

"Nay; it would be sinful, in such a question, to follow the clue of profane philosophy," said Mr. Wilson. "Better to fast and pray upon it; and still better, it may be, to leave the mystery as we find it, unless Providence reveal it of its own accord. Thereby, every good Christian man hath a title to show a father's kindness towards the poor, deserted babe."1

Hawthorne has carefully prepared us for this desperate plea on the part of Hester Prynne. Almost three years have passed since the day Hester stood on the scaffold in the market place, a small baby in her arms. Hawthorne has devoted two narrative chapters to these three years in the life of Hester Prynne. She has lived alone and yet in daily intercourse with the people of Boston; wrestling constantly with the ambiguity of her position in relation to that community. At the same time she is rearing a child to take a place someday as a member of society. This fact greatly intensifies the dilemma inherent in Hester's own position.

Then, she was supported by the unnatural tension of her nerves, and by all the combative energy of her character, which enabled her to convert the scene into a kind of lurid triumph. It was, moreover, a separate and insulated event, to occur but once in her lifetime, and to meet which, therefore, reckless of economy, she might call up the vital strength that would have sufficed for many quiet years. The very law that condemned her-- a giant of stern features but with a vigor to support, as well as to annihilate, in his iron arm--had held

her up through the terrible ordeal of her igno-

miny. But now, with this unattended walk from
her prison door, began the daily custom; and she
must either sustain and carry it forward by the
ordinary resources of her nature or sink beneath
it. She could no longer borrow from the future
to help her through the present grief. Tomorrow
would bring its own trial with it; so would the
next day, and so would the next; each its own
trial, and yet the very same that was now so un-
utterably grievous to be borne. The days of the
far-off future would toil on, still with the
same burden for her to take up and bear along with
her, but never to fling down; for the accumulating
days and added years, would pile up their misery
upon the heap of shame. Throughout them all,
giving up her individuality, she would become the
general symbol at which the preacher and moralist
might point, and in which they might vivify and
embodify their images of women's frailty and sinful
passion. Thus the young and pure would be taught
to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming
on her breast,—at her, the child of honorable
parents,—at her, the mother of a babe, that would
hereafter be a woman,—at her, who had once been
innocent,—as the figure, the body, the reality
of sin. And over her grave, the infamy that she
must carry thither would be her only monu-

The ambiguity and the torture of Hester's position that Haw-
thorne presented by allusion and symbol in the opening scene,
now becomes specific in our minds. She, Hester Prynne,—
the daughter of honorable parents, once a functioning member
of society, the mother of a child who will become a woman,—
is being shorn of her individuality, is being destroyed as
a woman, for only as functioning members of society do we
exist as individuals, as men and women. Only the native
strength of her character, that Hawthorne has been able to
make us feel so vividly when she was forced to call upon her

1. Hawthorne, op. cit., p.130.
the question to illustrate the presence of the part; the
and youth are one—we hearken back to Hawthorne's use of
Boston. There is no new beginning, no essential change, as
it will强烈 by the symbol of her identity as surely
for both would deplore her trait of her father's identity, as surely
in her repetition. Both courtesies are of course, equal and
taken in her repetition, both courtesies are of course, equal and
deprecated known, where she can fulfill the part of her nature expressed
of the forest, the realm of the rose, where moral law is un-
beast still the unostentatious bundle, law, or into the wild
open to her—beast to old—beast to old, where dependence of Hilde-
the first scene. If Hester should flee, two directions the
vision of the symbols and associations that he presented in

we must note, in addition, Hawthorne's careful

result of mortification."

she had lost; more soul-like, because of the
and work out another part of that base which
her daily shame would at length make her feel,
the torque of punishment, and of perversion, and of
and here should be the scene of her fortune
bade to heravar, had been the scene of her guilt,
truth, and half the delusion, here, the
confounding a resolution of new blindness;—was half
firmly, the pernicious upon a motive for
what she complained hark to believe—what,

or of the beast with a real revulsion but Hester could not.
demned her, to continue the symbolical part of the resolution
to Hester to continue compounded the society that had con-

canarest that last seal in revulsion and the path was open
her consciousness ordain. The strength of another, however,
least resources in her great trial, can sustain her through

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...have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Anne Hutchinson, as the foundress of a religious sect. She might, in one of her phases, have been a prophetess. She might, and not improbably would, have suffered death from the stern tribunals of the period, for attempting to undermine the foundations of the puritan establishment. But, in the education of her child, the mother's enthusiasm of thought had something to wreak itself upon.

In addition, Hester discerns, it may be, the hopelessness of such a task.

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. A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought. They are not to be solved, or only in one way. If her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish. Thus, Hester Fynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb, wandered without a clew in the dark labyrinth of her mind; now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now starting back from a deep chasm. There was wild and ghostly scenery all around her, and a home and comfort nowhere.

2. Ibid., p. 187.
And now Hester somehow begins to realize that any future, any redemption, any rebirth must be built torturously on the past.

Her sin, her ignominy were the roots which she had struck into the soil. It was as if a new birth, with stranger assimilations than the first, had converted the forest-land, still so uncongenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer, into Hester's wild and dreary, but life-long home.... The chain that bound her here was of iron links, and galling to her inmost soul, but could never be broken.

The theme of the presentness of the past, a hint planted in the first scene, will now be worked out on the vivid level of human involvement as an integral part of the story.

Hester is too strong to be thrust into nothingness by her society and she finds an occupational gap in Boston that she fills with her needlework. She sought to acquire only subsistence for herself and a simple abundance for her daughter but there was work enough to keep her busy.

In this manner, Hester Prynne came to have a part to perform in the world. With her native energy of character, and rare capacity, it could not entirely cast her off, although it had set a mark upon her, more intolerable to a woman's heart than that which branded the brow of Cain. In all her intercourse with society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied and after expressed, that 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; no more smiles with the household

joy, nor mourn with the kindred sorrow; or, should it succeed in manifesting its forbidden sympathy, awakening only terror and horrible repugnance.¹

Bother in her mind and in her daily intercourse with society the pain of Hester's ambiguous position grows in intensity instead of being diminished by time. There is one other thing too that acts and reacts upon Hester and that is little Pearl. Pearl is the living symbol of all that sears Hester's heart. Here is a living reminder,—a reminder met and lived with every moment of every day,—a reminder of the scarlet letter. Pearl is

...the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life! The mother herself—as if the red ignominy were so deeply scorched into her brain that all her conceptions assumed its form—had carefully wrought out the similitude, lavishing many hours of morbid ingenuity, to create an analogy between the object of her affection and emblem of her guilt and torture. But, in truth Pearl was the one, as well as the other; and only in consequence of that identity had Hester contrived to perfectly represent the scarlet letter in her appearance.²

But Pearl is more than this to her mother for she is a wild and capricious child, completely unamenable to rules. It seemed to Hester that her own impassioned state had been the medium through which were transmitted to the unborn infant the rays of its moral life; and, however white and clear originally, they had taken the deep stains of crimson and gold, the fiery lustre, the black shadow and the untempered light of the intervening substance. Above all, the warfare of Hester's spirit, at that epoch was perpetuated in Pearl.³

1. Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 133.
2. Ibid., pp. 143-4.
3. Ibid., p. 137.
Hawthorne is quick to associate this element of lawlessness with the Nature of the forest and the wild rose. Pearl has a wild-flower prettiness, she is a bird of scarlet plumage, a sea bird ready for flight. Hester is able to find in Pearl a manifestation for all her torment, all her fears and yet,

God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man had thus punished, had given her a lovely child, whose place was on the same dishonored bosom, to connect her parent for ever with the race and descent of mortals, and to be finally a blessed soul in Heaven.

Thus, before Hester ever cries out the anguished words: "She is my happiness—she is my torture none the less!...Ye shalt not take her! I will die first!" we know that it is Pearl who keeps her in life, for Pearl embodies in the living form of a daughter all of the anguish of Hester's enigmatic position and at the same time Pearl is her one intimate contact; she is a daughter a million-fold.

Hester's visit to the home of the Governor has put into dramatic form the results of three years of torment on the mind of Hester Prynne. Three years of ignominy have failed to dull the sharpness of her passion and her pride. She is not broken and yet she is no nearer a reconciliation with her society, with her own deepest promptings than she was the day she looked around at her townspeople with a haughty smile. But Hawthorne's dramatic scenes do more than vivify what his narrative has established, for it is by

means of these scenes that the story moves along. In these scenes the basic elements of the structural form are established.

In this scene we get our first glimpse of the young minister since he spoke to Hester in the market-place and our first look at the physician since he left Hester in the prison. The pain in the young man's eyes has not lessened but become more pronounced. The turmoil of his spirit has acted upon his physical appearance and he has grown more careworn and emaciated. He has developed the habit of instinctively holding his hand over his heart whenever his nervous temperament is agitated. He responds immediately to Hester's plea for aid and his sympathies, that no other man can have, make his words convincing, so convincing that he causes the physician to remark that his words convey a strange earnestness. Hester has noticed the change that has come over Arthur but she is startled to see the new appearance of Roger Chillingworth for his features are so much uglier, his complexion darker and his figure more misshapen. His words reveal his intense concentration on the object of his search and we do not doubt for a moment what lies behind his remark about the young minister's plea. Even though the magistrates are now content to leave the mystery of the child's father to Providence, old Roger Chillingworth is searching even in the child's appearance for a clue to the problem that obsesses him.

The scene has put Hester's dilemma in dramatic form
and has brought our attention to the intense and horrible relation between the physician and the minister who are living together under the same roof. The next natural step for Hawthorne to take is to expand on this relationship between the two, and this is exactly what he does. The old physician had taken an affinity to the young man and determined that if it were within his power he certainly would do all that he could to aile the minister's bodily affliction.

Thus Roger Chillingworth scrutinized his patient carefully, both as he saw him in his ordinary life, keeping an accustomed pathway in the range of thoughts familiar to him, and as he appeared when thrown amidst other moral scenery, the novelty of which might cell out something new to the surface of his character. He deemed it essential, it would seem, to know the man, before attempting to do him good. Wherever there is a heart and an intellect, the diseases of the physical frame are tinged with the peculiarities of these. In Arthur Dimmesdale, thought and imagination were so active, and sensibility so intense, that the bodily infirmity would be likely to have its groundwork there.  

As time went on

a kind of intimacy, as we have said, grew up between these two cultivated minds, which had as wide a field as the whole sphere of human thought and study, to meet upon; they discussed every topic of ethics and religion, of public affairs and private character; they talked much on both sides, of matters that seemed personal to themselves; and yet no secret, such as the physician fancied must exist there, ever stole out of the minister's consciousness into his companion's ear. The latter had his suspicions, indeed, that even the nature of Mr. Dimmesdale's bodily disease had never fairly been revealed to him. It was a strange reserve!

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2. loc. cit.
For most of the people of Boston the advent of the physician seemed a blessing in the form of a stroke of Almighty aid to their beloved pastor. They looked with hope and confidence upon the firm friendship that was growing up between the two men. There were others, however, who, seeing that Mr. Dimmesdale showed no indications of returning to health, and being of a more superstitious nature, took another view of the situation.

To sum up the matter, it grew to be a widely diffused opinion, that the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, like many other personages of especial sanctity, in all ages of the Christian world, was haunted either by Satan himself, or Satan's emissary, in the guise of old Roger Chillingworth. This diabolical agent had the divine permission, for a season, to burrow into the clergyman's intimacy, and plot against his soul. No sensible man, it was confessed, could doubt on which side the victory would turn.

Hawthorne does not say that we should give particular credence to either of these theories. Neither may be literally true but both contain truth on other levels. The physician was, for instance, beginning to resemble a fiend through his immersion in his search.

He had begun an investigation, as he imagined, with the severe and equal integrity of a judge, desirous only of truth, even as if the question involved no more than the air-drawn lines and figures of a geometrical problem, instead of human passions, and wrongs inflicted on himself. But, as he proceeded, a terrible fascination, a kind of fierce, though still calm, necessity seized the old man within its grip, and never set him free again until he had done all its bidding. He now dug into the poor clergyman's

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1. Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 159.
heart, like a miner searching for gold; or, rather, like a sexton delving into a grave, possibly in quest of a jewel that had been buried on the dead man's bosom, but likely to find nothing save mortality and corruption. Alas for his own soul, if these were what he sought.

This change in the old physician and the anguish of the minister are covered, revealed and intensified by Hawthorne's use of dramatic irony.

It was inevitable that some day the probing tool of the physician and the wound of the minister should come in contact. When that happens, Hawthorne again portrays it in the form of action.

One day, as the physician is returning to the house with a peculiar bundle of weeds, he finds the opportunity to put his as yet embryonic theories to a test.

"Where," asked he, with a look askance at them,—for it was the clergyman's peculiarity that he seldom, now-a-days, looked straight forth at any object, whether human or inanimate,—"where, my kind doctor, did you gather those herbs, with such a dark, flabby leaf?"

"Even in the graveyard here at hand," answered the physician continuing his employment. "They are new to me. I found them growing on a grave, which bore no tombstone, nor other memorial of the dead man, save these ugly weeds, that have taken upon themselves to keep him in remembrance. They grew out of his heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him, and which he had done better to confess during his lifetime."

"Perchance," said Mr. Dimmesdale, "he earnestly desired it, but could not."

"And wherefore?" rejoined the physician. "Wherefore not; since all the powers of nature call so earnestly for the confession of sin, that these black weeds have sprung up out of a buried heart, to make manifest an unspoken crime."2.

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2. Ibid., p.161.
The conversation turns on this theme, each man using personal allusions in his arguments but disguising them carefully under the general theme. For instance, Arthur even rises to a defense of his own position under the guise of general speculation. Speaking of men who see fit to hide a great sin he says:

"Or,—can we not suppose it?—guilty as they may be, retaining, nevertheless, a zeal for God's glory and man's welfare, they shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, thence forward, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service. So, to their own unutterable torment they go about among their fellow-creatures, looking pure as new-fallen snow, while their hearts are all speckled and spotted with iniquity of which they cannot rid themselves." 1.

About this time their conversation is interrupted momentarily as Hester Prynne and little Pearl pass over the path that leads through the graveyard. Pearl is in one of her moods of perverse merriment. She skips from grave to grave, till arriving at one broad, flat tombstone she stops to dance on its surface. In answer to Hester's entreaties that she act more decorously she snatches some burrs from the burdock growing nearby and throws them at the scarlet letter, where they cling tenaciously. Roger Chillingworth remarks, as much to himself as to his companion,

"There is no law, nor reverence for authority, no regard for human ordinances or opinions, mixed up with that child's composition...I saw her,

the other day, bespatter the Governor himself with
water at the cattle trough in Spring Lane...
Hath she any discoverable principle of being?"
"None,—save the freedom of a broken law," answered Mr. Dimmesdale....

Pearl notices the two men standing by the window and threw
one of her burrs at the clergyman, who shrank back with ner-
vous dread. The four observed each other for a moment in
silence and then Pearl shouted:

"Come away, mother! Come away, or yonder old
Black Man will catch you! He hath got hold of the
minister already. Come away, mother, or he will
catch you! But he cannot catch little Pearl!"  

She skips away leading her mother by the hand. After their
departure the physician asks if the minister believes that
Hester Prynne is less miserable for the scarlet letter on
her breast and Arthur Dimmesdale answers that he is sure that
she is. The physician now turns the conversation to his
patient's health and concludes:

"...a sickness, a sore place, if we may so
call it, in your spirit, hath immediately its
appropriate manifestation in your bodily frame.
Would you, therefore, that your physician heal
the bodily evil? How may this be, unless you
first lay open to him the wound or trouble in
your soul?"
"No!—not to thee!—not to an earthly phy-
sician!" cried Mr. Dimmesdale passionately, and
turning his eyes full and bright, and with a
kind of fierceness, on old Roger Chillingworth.
"Not to thee! But if it be the soul's disease,
then do I commit myself to the one Physician of
the soul! He, if it stand with his good pleasure
can cure; or he can kill! Let him do with me
as, in his justice and wisdom, he shall see good.

1. *Hawthorne*, op. cit., p.163.
2. *loc. cit.*
But who art thou, that meddest in this matter?—that darres thrust himself between the sufferer and his God?"1.

With a frantic gesture he rushed out of the room. It is not long, however, before the young minister repents of his outburst and the friendship is restored, as if the incident had never occurred. The physician, however, now smells hot blood and it is not long before he happens into Arthur Dimmesdale's room when the young clergyman is lying on a couch in a deep sleep.

The physician advanced directly in front of his patient, laid his hand upon his bosom, and thrust aside the vestment that, hitherto had always covered even from the professional eye.

Then, indeed, Mr. Dimmesdale shuddered and slightly stirred.

After a brief pause the physician turned away.

But with what a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror! With what a ghastly rapture, as it were, too mighty to be expressed only by the eye and features, and therefore bursting forth through the whole ugliness of his figure, and making itself even riotously manifest by the extravagant gestures with which he threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot on the floor! Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom.

But what distinguished the physician's ecstasy from Satan's was the traits of wonder in it!2.

We have returned to the burdock and the graveyard of the opening chapter. Let us pause once again to note how Hawthorne has expanded on his use of symbol and association.

The maze of symbol and association has become extremely complex.

2. Ibid., p.166.
If it were once possible to sift this maze for a systematic order, for an allegory, that possibility is no longer feasible. Instead, particularly since the reader does not make a complex graph of equations as he reads, these symbols and associations have, as we have shown, their primary purpose in intensifying and expanding on the meaning of the action. They enable Hawthorne to achieve a depth and subtlety and at the same time portray the stern, starved atmosphere of colonial New England. We can further illustrate this fact from the present scene.

Hawthorne has deliberately associated Roger Chillingworth with the Black Man,—the emissary of Satan who lurks in the forest and communes with those of the Puritans who have fallen away from the law of God. Now this is purely the Puritan view of the leech,—Hawthorne does not necessarily subscribe to it,—but that does not prevent him from using this view to its fullest dramatic import. Thus the reader, having learned the Puritan view of Roger in respect to the minister, after hearing little refer to him as the Black Man and knowing that his search is making him more a fiend than a man, is prepared for the final scene in which he uncovers the bosom of Arthur Dimmesdale. If this scene, and particularly Hawthorne's description of it, had not had this preparation it would leave the reader cold and incredulous. But having the preparation that fits so well into the method with which the reader has become familiar the scene has a
varied but vivid emotional impact. It is more life-like and vivid than if it were presented bare and unattended. Thus, Hawthorne's "realism" is not real because of its photographic accuracy but because it reacts on and moves real and basic emotions in the reader. It lives primarily, in the realm of life that lies under appearances. And Hawthorne, not content to leave it at that, paints this reality by his use of dramatic irony.

We should, perhaps, add a word about the complexity of the associations in these last scenes. We have spoken of the Puritan view of the forest as the realm of evil, the domain of Satan and have shown how Hawthorne uses the association of Roger Chillingworth with this element to add to the dramatic effect. Hawthorne gives this concept multitudinous branches and connections, each of which we could follow out to a particular dramatic action. Since, however, the primary structural form resides in the sequence of these actions (and in why the actions of necessity follow that sequence) we will only suggest how this primary structure is strengthened and deepened by Hawthorne's use of association and symbol.

We will use as our door to this maze Mistress Hibbins, the witch, who, in the eyes of the Puritans is possessed of the Devil, and who makes the name witch synonymous with one who has completely renounced all moral and social responsibilities, who has lost her individuality, her womanhood, her
sanity. When she invites Hester into the forest she is ostensibly asking her to join the league of the Devil against the law and works of God, represented by the Puritan settlement. On another level, however, she is asking Hester to renounce all moral and social obligations, womanhood and sanity. When Hester refuses—

"Make my excuse to him, the Black Man so please you!" answered Hester with a triumphant smile. "I must tarry at home, and keep watch over my little Pearl. Had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone with thee into the forest...." 1.

--it is a refusal on both of these levels and more, for as we have seen, Pearl, in addition to being the living enemy of Hester's ostracism from society, is also her one real tie to that world of mortals. Pearl points, and is, the path Hester must follow to return to the full status of a woman.

We must remember too that Mistress Hibbins is the sister of Governor Bellingham and as such we see that even the self-professed witches are a natural product of Puritan society. The Puritans were notorious for hanging witches because the Puritans were notorious for creating witches—real witches—people who had renounced all moral and social responsibility. In the Puritan world this meant to take up league with Satan. And even in our world it means much the same thing. Then, as we have implied before, the set of symbols that gathers around the Puritan dichotomy of good and

evil is not the only set of symbols in the *The Scarlet Letter*. Puritan society produces Mistress Hibbins; it also produces the prison and in the same way Anna Hutchinson, the "sainted" Anne Hutchinson. Anne, we remember, was associated with the rose bush and this association gives another complex of connotations to the forest, connotations much different from those given by the Puritans. In the latter complex, weeds, the ugly and evil part of the forest are associated with the Puritan law, and the rose, the beautiful and good, has likeness to those who are ostracised by that law. This does not mean that Anne equals rose equals Hester equals Mistress Hibbins. It does mean that all of these people and objects in addition to the prison, Governor Bellingham and the magistrates have some good in common and some evil. Hawthorne does not draw black and white pictures of people; he casts his people against the maze of good and evil that is the world and shows the reflection of that maze in them.

These two sets of symbols: the one adopted from the Puritan cosmology and the other imposed by Hawthorne, are constantly meeting and intermingling. The outstanding example of this is probably Pearl. For the Puritans Pearl is an imp of evil, a descendant of the Black Man, while on another level she is associated with the beautiful rose and is capable of aiding her mother both to reconciliation and to sainthood. These are not speculations only for the reader, however; for Hester, who is a Puritan but also has been led
to freedom of thought, they are all living tortures and hopes. For the reader, then, their greatest impact is in the emotional reaction to Hester, who feels all of these thoughts and associations flit across her heart and prick and intensify her anguish.

Parris is of particular importance to someone else also, to her disguised father, the young minister. We have devoted considerable time to the ambiguity of Hester's social position but we have only casually mentioned the minister because Hawthorne has chosen to leave him in the background. He has shown him only in contact with Hester and in relation to the old physician, Roger Chillingworth. These glimpses have clearly revealed the torment and strife that are his soul, revealed his pride that refuses to relinquish his honored position in society, though that be the path to peace. Now, in preparation for the second scene on the scaffold Hawthorne devotes a narrative chapter to the young minister. He chooses a less oblique method of portrayal of the inner man than that to which we have become accustomed. He portrays the harsh and never-ending acts of penance that have become a routine with Arthur. The young minister fasts until his knees shake beneath him. He keeps vigils, sometimes in utter darkness, sometimes with his face before a mirror, but all to no avail. He cannot renounce his position in society and yet he cannot accept his responsibility to the law of that society. His hypocrisy is intensified because it is
through his torment that his social position is so exalted.

While thus suffering under bodily disease, and gnawed and tortured by some black trouble of the soul, and given over to the machinations of his deadliest enemy, the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale had achieved a brilliant popularity in his sacred office. He won it, indeed, in great part, by his sorrows. His intellectual gifts, his moral perceptions, his power of experiencing and communicating emotion, were deep in a state of preternatural activity by the prick and anguish of his daily life. His fame, though still on its upward slope, already overshadowed the soberer reputations of his fellow clergymen, eminent as several of them were.¹

He determined several times to ascend the pulpit in order to reveal his true nature to all the world; in fact, he more than once stood before his congregation and reviled his sinful, ugly self, but was never specific. The audience heard it all, and did but reverence him the more. They little guessed what deadly purport lurked in those self-condemning words. "The Godly youth," said they among themselves. "The saint on earth! Alas, if he discern such sinfulness in his own white soul, what horrible spectacle would he behold in thine or mine!" The minister well knew,—subtle but remorseful hypocrite that he was!—the light in which his vague confession would be viewed. He had strived to put a cheat upon himself by making the avowal of a guilty conscience, but had gained only one other sin, and a self-acknowledged shame, without the momentary relief of being self-deceived. He had spoken the very truth and transformed it into the veriest falsehood. And yet, by the constitution of his nature, he loved the truth, and loathed the lie, as few men ever did. Therefore, above all things else, he loathed his miserable self!²

So he forced himself to stand long hours before the mirror or upon his knees in an attempt to gain through outward

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¹ Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 167.
² Ibid., p. 169.
show what he could not gain through inner strength; his greatest lie was not to others but to himself, a lie exemplified by these long, fruitless vigils.

On one of these ugly nights...the minister started from his chair. A new thought had struck him. There might be a moment's peace in it.¹

He dressed himself and walked, while the whole town slept, to the scaffold in the marked place and there took his place on the boards where Hester had stood and where no sleepy eye would open to discover him.

Why, then, had he come hither? was it but the mockery of penitence? A mockery indeed but in which his soul trifled with itself! A mockery at which angels blushed and wept, while fiends rejoiced with jeering laughter! He had been driven hither by the impulse of that Remorse which dogged him everywhere, and whose own sister and closely linked companion was that Cowardice which invariably drew him back, with her tremulous grip, just when the other impulse had hurried him to the verge of a disclosure.²

And so Mr. Dimmesdale chooses the middle of the night to make his appearance on the scaffold, Hawthorne's stage. He has also chosen, quite by coincidence, the death-night of Governor Winthrop. The young minister's imagination runs rife and he fancies himself standing before every eye in the universe; he thinks himself exposed to the town and stands in tense fear as Reverend Wilson passes on his return from the bedside of Winthrop, but he is not discovered. That is he is not discovered so as to expose his

¹. Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 170.
². Ibid., p. 171.
secret to the world, for Hester Prynne passes with Pearl, also returning home from the house of Winthrop. Arthur calls to them and asks them to mount the scaffold to him, join him in the center of the stage.

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

"Minister!" whispered little Pearl.

"What wouldst thou say, child?" asked Mr. Dimmesdale.

"Wilt thou stand here with mother and me, tomorrow noontide?" inquired Pearl.

"Nay; not so, my little Pearl!" answered the minister; for with the new energy of the moment, all the dread of public exposure, that had so long been the anguish of his life, returned to him; and he was already trembling at the conjunction in which—with a strange joy, nevertheless—he now found himself. "Not so, my child. I shall, indeed stand with thy mother and thee, one other day, but not tomorrow."

Pearl laughed and attempted to pull away her hand. But the minister held it fast.

"A moment longer, my child!" said he.

"But wilt thou promise," asked Pearl, "to take my hand and mother's hand tomorrow noontide?"

"Not then, Pearl," said the minister, "but another time."

"And what other time?" persisted the child.

"At the great judgement day," whispered the minister,--and, strangely enough, the sense that he was a professional teacher of the truth impelled him to answer the child so. "Then, and there, before the judgement seat, thy mother, and thou, and I must stand together. But the daylight of this world shall not see our meeting."

Pearl laughed again.

At that moment a red light shines in the sky, doubtless from

a meteor, but for the minister it seems to take the form of an immense letter A.

Not but the meteor may have shown itself at that point, burning duskily through a veil of cloud; but with no such shape as his guilty imagination gave it; or, at least, with so little definiteness, that another's guilt might have seen another symbol in it.1

The meteor also lighted the face of Roger Chillingworth, who stood, now, near the scaffold. It was "a singular circumstance that characterized Mr. Dimmesdale's psychological state at this moment."2 It seemed, to the minister, that the physician could have passed for the arch-fiend. "So vivid was the expression, or so intense the minister's perception of it, that it seemed still to remain painted in the darkness, after the meteor had vanished...."3

"Who is that man, Hester?" gasped Mr. Dimmesdale overcome with terror. "I shiver at him! Dost thou know the man? I hate him, Hester!" She remembered her oath and was silent.4

But little Pearl looked up at him and spoke:

"Minister,...I can tell thee who he is!" "Quickly, then, child!" said the minister, bending his ear close to her lips. "Quickly,--and as low as thou canst whisper."5

She mumbled some unintelligible gibberish and then laughed aloud.

"Dost thou mock me now?" asked the minister. "Thou wast not bold!--Thou wast not true!"--

answered the child. "Thou wouldst not promise to take my hand, and mother's hand tomorrow noontide!"  

The physician approaches, mentions that the minister should return home with him in order to guard his health, covering any knowledge of the reason for the minister's vigil.

"I will go home with you," said Mr. Dimmesdale. With a chill despondency, like one awaking all nervous, from an ugly dream, he yielded himself to the physician, and was led away.

Physically, by chapters, this is the mid-point of the novel: chapter twelve of twenty-four. It is the middle scene of the three scenes on the scaffold. We can find several notable differences between these two arbitrarily separated halves of Hawthorne's story. First of all, only half of the first twelve chapters (chapters 2, 3, 4, 8, 10 and 12) were devoted to specific scenes or actions; the other six were primarily or essentially narrative. In the last half of the story, however, only the first and last chapters (thirteen and twenty-four) are narrative while the other ten are primarily devoted to a particular scene or action.

Hawthorne, then, is able to rely more on direct action as his story progresses. This will give us a feeling of faster pace as we move towards the climax, a feeling which corresponds to the time element in the story, for the first twelve chapters cover seven years in time and chapters thirteen to twenty-three, though Hawthorne does not specifically

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1. Hawthorne, op. cit. p. 175.
2. Ibid. cit.
say, cover a month at the outside. This element of time, however, is not the basic thing that allows Hawthorne to speed up the pace in the second half of his story. The other, the basic, reason arises from the method that we have examined. We have found that Hawthorne's narrative has several purposes: 1. to establish character, story and environment and to tie these three inseparably together, 2. to add depth and meaning to his stern and starved story without destroying the essential tone; and finally 3. to manifest all of this by giving intensity and significance to the action. When we have reached this scene on the scaffold the narrative ground-work has been well laid and Hawthorne is able to give primary attention to the action, knowing that the reader has well-rooted in his mind a vast complication of symbol and association that multiplies itself as the action proceeds.

Finally, since Hawthorne can now rely more on action, his story will become more life-like, his people more credible.

We have felt that a close examination of the first half of the story was necessary in order to establish the fact that the depths of association and symbol were subordinate to and yet inseparable from the action. We are now free to devote ourselves to the essential structural form as governed by the course of the action (plot) for we are familiar with the vast subtlety that makes the action what it is.

The second scene on the scaffold has brought all of our accumulated knowledge into focus with Hawthorne's story.
For instance, the mock penitence of Arthur Dimmesdale and the fruitless entreaties of little Pearl bring vividly to life the torment that is devastating the minister both physically and spiritually. His Remorse and Cowardice (the latter rooted in pride) which Hawthorne has obliquely explored are focused in living action. The same is true of Roger Chillingworth, who carefully covers his fiendish monomania with a cool and innocent exterior. He appears a fiend in the light of the meteor and he calmly lays his hands on the minister as a helpful physician and benefactor. Here in the light of the meteor, the light of the scarlet letter, the true nature of both men stands out and the cloak with which each has covered himself is stripped off.

By use of this strange light Hawthorne has riveted our attention on the essential underlying character of these men, forcibly returned our attention to the situation as it exists under appearances.¹ He has shown clearly the situation that his wide use of irony has pointed up. Thus, in yet

¹ We might note that in contrast to this scene Hawthorne follows with an incident in the sunlight of the morning. The sexton takes Mr. Dimmesdale aside after the morning service to return a glove which was found on the scaffold. The sexton uses the incident as a parable to reassert his confidence in the minister's godliness. He also remarks about the meteor, saying that its appearance in the form of an A was emblematic of Angel in honor of Governor Winthrop. Hawthorne's use of light and dark is extremely complex and extremely interesting throughout the novel. Perhaps a parallel could be drawn between underlying truth and unnatural light or shade on the one hand and appearances and natural sunlight on the other hand. For our purposes, however, we only note how Hawthorne points the difference between truth and appearance in this particular case.
another way he has prepared us for the second half of the story in which he will rely mainly on action and follow closely the working out of the plot as guided by the necessary action of these particular people in this particular situation.
CHAPTER III

As we turn to the narrative thirteenth chapter we find a new kind of concentration. This is narrative that contributes directly to furthering the action. Hawthorne's oblique method gives way to a more direct method. He has several specific things to tell us. First, her second experience on the scaffold had made a strong impression on Hester, particularly in regard to the minister. The weird light of the meteor/scarlet letter has brought the situation into focus for her too. Seeing the present state of the minister and knowing what he once was, she feels strongly, for the first time, her own responsibility.

Hester saw—or seemed to see—that there lay a certain responsibility upon her, in reference to the clergyman, which she owed to no other...Here was the iron link of mutual crime, which neither he nor she could break. Like all other ties it brought along with it its obligations.

Hawthorne also has some direct things to say about the psychological effect of the past seven years on Hester and her community. She has become virtually a self-ordained Sister of Mercy, which is an actual working out of the premonitions that Hawthorne has given us through reference to Anne Hutchinson, et. al. And this has come about through

Hester's strength,—the same strength that made her repudiate this community, in so far as repudiation is possible without destroying herself as Mistress Hibbins and Roger Chillingworth have done.

Such helpfulness was found in her,—so much power to do, and power to sympathize,—that many people refused to interpret the Scarlet Letter by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength.¹

But it was not for Hester to follow through with her repudiation of society, either along the path of Mistress Hibbins or that of Anne Hutchinson. The reason for the first we have explained and as we have mentioned the reason for the latter also centers in little Pearl. Pearl brings to life Hester's tie to society, her link of crime, points her return to an integral place in the world, as does the scarlet letter. In Hester's ambiguous position of an outcast,

There was a wild and ghastly scenery all around her, and a home and comfort nowhere. At times a fearful doubt strove to possess her soul, whether it were not better to send Pearl at once to heaven, and go herself to such futurity as Eternal Justice should provide.

The scarlet letter had not done its office.²

But now a new and pressing consideration occupies her thoughts, but a consideration that must involve a decision in regard to her ambiguous position in society, her responsibility to those about her.

Hester could not but ask herself, whether there had not originally been a defect of truth, courage

¹. Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 179
². Ibid., p. 182.
and loyalty, on her own part, in allowing the
minister to be thrown into a position where so
much evil was to be foreboded, and nothing sus-
picious to be hoped....Under that impulse, she had
made her choice, and had chosen, as it now ap-
ppeared, the most wretched alternative of the two.
She determined to redeem her error, so far as it
might yet be possible....
In fine, Hester Prynne resolved to meet her
former husband, and do what might be in her
power for the rescue of the victim on whom he had
so evidently set his gripes.¹

By the use of narrative, this chapter had kept our
attention constantly on the course of the action. As we
follow that action our method will become more of a comment
than an actual presentation. The action itself is familiar
enough to the reader and since we will not be drawing on
Hawthorne's words in such detail it will not be necessary to
quote him to the extent that we have in the past pages. Our
purpose, then, will be to fit the various incidents of the
plot together so as to see clearly the essential form that
they work toward and finally achieve.

To resume where we left the action: it was not long
before Hester found occasion to speak with the old Physician.
She found him, one afternoon, gathering herbs near the sea-
shore, and leaving little Pearl to play on the beach she
advanced towards the man, the scarlet letter burning on her
bosom for "Here was another ruin, the responsibility of which
came partly home to her."² In the course of their conver-
sation the truth of her responsibility, both to the physician

¹. Hawthorne, op. cit., p.183.
². Ibid., p.184.
and to the young minister comes home to Hester, but more
than this comes a realization of the hopelessness of the
situation that she has allowed to fester and mature through
her inactivity. The full realization brings her to the edge
of despair ("There is no good for him,—no good for me,—
no good for thee! There is no good for little Pearl! There
is no path to guide us out of this dismal maze!"1.), but she
pleads once again that the old physician abandon his patient
and "leave further retribution to the power that claims it,"2.
but this cannot be, as the old man well knows. If he were
to leave Arthur he would be as a parasite torn loose from
its host to shrivel and die in the sun, for Arthur is his
whole life. He is no longer guided by his will entirely,
nor is Hester and he says as much.

"Peace, Hester, peace!" replied the old man,
with a gloomy sternness. "It is not granted me
to pardon. I have no such power as thou telllest
me of. My old faith, long forgotten, comes back
to me, and explains all that we do, and all we
suffer. By thy first step awry thou didst plant
the germ of evil; but since that moment, it has
been a dark necessity. Ye that have wronged me
are not sinful, save in a kind of typical illu-
sion; neither am I fiend-like, who have snatched
a fiend's office from his hands. It is our fate.
Let the black flower blossom as it may! Now go
thy ways and deal as thou wilt with yonder man."3.

With this he leaves Hester, who returns for Pearl.
She finds the child wearing the letter A on her breast, fashi-
oned from seaweed. The letter cannot be ignored and soon

2.loc. cit.
3.loc. cit.
Pearl is earnestly pleading that her mother tell her the meaning of the scarlet letter, and why the minister holds his hand over his heart. But Hester cannot pay such a price even if it means gaining the child's sympathy. She answers,

"Silly Pearl...what questions are these? There are many things in this world that a child must not ask about. What know I of the minister's heart? And as for the scarlet letter, I wear it for the sake of its gold thread."

It is the first time that Hester has ever been false to the letter. Perhaps such is the natural product of her despair, perhaps also it points to a possible complete renunciation, of any reconciliation to society, of any return to a place she can call home.

Nevertheless Hester remains determined to make known to Mr. Dimmesdale the true character of the man he calls friend and physician. In pursuance of this aim she goes to the forest to await Arthur as he returns from a visit with a missionary to the Indians.

The scene in the forest richly reasserts and expands on the depth of symbol and association that are so much a part of Hawthorne's story. In each word, gesture and leaf-fall all of the old connotations are revivified and given new shades of meaning and new connotations are added. Despite this the action stands out and the plot moves on its course directed only by the necessary actions of these particular people in this particular situation.

This meeting in the forest occupies four chapters and contains the essential turn of the story. After Hester reveals the secret that she has kept for so many years the minister is left in a state of utter despair. His long ordeal has so drained him that he no longer has the strength to move one step more. When Hester suggests that he leave this community, go away and "exchange this false life of thine for a true one. Be, if thy spirit summon thee to such a mission, the teacher and apostle of the red men. Or,—as is more thy nature,—be a scholar and a sage among the wisest and most renowned of the cultivated world."¹ the suggestion can mean nothing to him. Then, however, comes the assertion of Hester's strength and pride for which we have been so long prepared. She says that he need not go alone,—she will be with him to provide her strength for his weakness.

It is a final assertion of the side of Hester's personality that prompted her to shrug off the beadle, that perhaps prompted her to tell Pearl that she wore the scarlet letter for the sake of its gold thread.

It is a decision that resolves the dilemma that has tormented Hester; it is a final revolt from society, an assertion that she can forge her own life, revoking the laws, denouncing the society that condemned her. For Arthur too, Hester's words seem to be a sign post in the fog leading towards a resolution of his torment, towards final peace for

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his soul. In token of their new freedom Hester takes the scarlet letter from her bosom and hurls it into the forest. Then a burst of sunshine pours through the leaves upon the pair for,

Such was the sympathy of Nature—that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subdued by human law, nor illumined by higher truth—with the bliss of these two spirits!

We must note this connotation of Nature which bears a strong resemblance to the rose which grew up at the feet of Anne Hutchinson, but we must also note that this sympathy for the broken law has a relation to the Puritan realm of the Black Man. All through these chapters Hawthorne plays one association against the other, particularly in relation to Pearl and her mother. The result on the reader’s mind is an emphasis on the lights and shades of good and evil that exist in Hester’s society, her crime and resultant ambiguous position. Now that her dilemma has been resolved the resolution is no clear cut act of good or evil. In fact, we can only judge her act, not by exterior moral law but by the laws of necessity that arise from the fact that Hester Prynne is who she is, and is involved in this particular situation.

At this point in the story, then, we can see clearly the fact that the essential structure, the guiding force of Hawthorne’s story is what he calls the “dark necessity,” the “black flower.” That is, Hawthorne has created characters

that are specific, that are the people they are and cannot change. It is thus that they are living people and it is for this reason that they will react in a particular way under particular circumstances and that the chain of these circumstances will follow a particular course like the growth and blossoming of a flower. To be specific, Hester is possessed of the essential character that we have discerned and she is bred a Puritan and is irrevocably linked by her crime to Boston. It is

...a fatality, a feeling so irresistible and inevitable that it has the force of doom, which almost invariably compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghost-like, the spot where some great and marked event has given the color to their lifetime; and still more irresistibly, the darker tinge that saddens it.¹

The same is perhaps even more true of Arthur Dimmesdale.

The question of right and wrong in Hester and Arthur’s act is not to be determined on an absolute moral scale; it has meaning only in reference to these people and their situation. We must not think that Hawthorne is stating finally that good and evil are purely relative; instead, he is saying that society breeds into the individual a conscience which the individual cannot destroy without destroying his soul. Arthur’s conscience is most poignantly evident in his desperate attempts at penitence; Hester’s in her constant attempts, through the scarlet letter and Pearl, to reconcile herself to her society and its laws.

¹ Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 131.
For the moment, however, as the two sit together in the forest with a new life before them, this conscience has been tossed away with the scarlet letter. Both have resolved the torment of their souls by declaring themselves superior to, no longer in need of, their consciences, free from the past. It is in act of pride; it declares them equal to, or superior to God, to the moral law of their society and the burden of the past. It is what the Greeks called an act of hybris.

The sunshine, a symbol of the great universe that exists outside of moral law, smiles on their act just as the rose was a token to the condemned criminal. That sun is the herald of a new day but a new day that Hester and Arthur can never know. Thus Hawthorne continues his theme of evil inherent in Puritan society but subordinates it and makes it a part of his great theme of man’s obligations as a social being and the truth that he first planted in his references to the prison, that the past and the future are one and that without the past the future is nothing. Specifically Hester’s act is an act of hybris that can lead only to tragedy. Hawthorne puts it in the following way and explains Hester’s place in the situation:

But Hester Prynne, with a mind of native courage and activity, and for so long a period not merely estranged, but outlawed from society, had habituated herself to such latitude of speculation as was altogether foreign to the clergyman. She had wandered without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness; as vast, as intricate and shadowy, as the
untamed forest, amid the gloom of which they were now holding a colloquy which was to decide their fate. Her intellect and heart had had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods. For years past she had looked from this estranged point of view at human institutions, and criticizing all with hardly more reverence than the Indian would feel for the clerical band, the judicial robe, the pillory, the gallows, the fireside, or the church. The tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free. The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread.

Shame, Dispair, Solitude! These had been her teachers, stern and wild ones,—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss.¹

For the moment, however, Hester and Arthur cannot realize that the renunciation of their society, of their consciences, of their past, of their very lives can lead only to destruction of manhood, of individuality, of soul through loss of reference to the world. They have only one dark reminder and that is the capriciousness of a little girl who will not accept a change in her mother's appearance, will not return to her until the scarlet letter is restored to its place on her breast, and who cannot accept the minister's kiss because of one of those little fantasies that often solidify into fact in a child's mind,—that he should stand with them on the scaffold in broad daylight. After the smile of the sunshine, the actions of Pearl return us to the cold actuality of the dark flower of tragedy. For Hester, however, these actions are easily explained away.

The young minister must maintain his double personality

for a few days more until the ship on which they book passage
sails for the Old World. But a change has come over him,
already there is a manifestation of his new-found freedom.
As he walks towards home, he is at every step "incited to do
some strange, wild, wicked thing or other." He almost
utters blasphemous suggestions regarding the communion
supper to one of his deacons; he is tempted to utter "an
unanswerable argument against the immortality of the human
soul" to a pious old lady who depends on him for sage and
sainted guidance. He meets Mistress Hibbins, who invites
him to return to the forest with her and meet the Black Man.
Finally, all of these people and even the church building
before him, seem to exist as something he has dreamed be­
fore or is dreaming now. The minister's new freedom is
only a newer and sharper torment.

We note too that Arthur Dimmesdale is secretly
pleased that the date of sailing must be postponed for a few
days because it allows him to preach the election sermon for
the new governor. It was a mark of the highest eminence for
a New England clergyman to be afforded this honor. And it is
election day in the market-place when Hawthorne returns his
characters to the scaffold/stage for the climax of his story.

This final scene could be dealt with in inexhaustable
detail for it focuses and resolves not only the action itself
but all of the vast depth of symbol and association that

2. Ibid., p. 214.
3. Ibid., p. 212.
enriches Hawthorne's story.

Again the market-place is filled with people, but this time they are in festive attire for this day is as close to a holiday as provincial New England could afford. As the crowd stands in the market-place awaiting the procession that will follow Mr. Dimmesdale's sermon, Hawthorne surveys the scene through the eyes of Hester and little Pearl. Every individual they see has at least one reference to what has gone before: the blacksmith, the jailer, the beadle, Mistress Hibbins. In contrast to the opening scene the market-place is filled with activity and Boston like the blacksmith "has washed his sooty face, and put on his Sabbath day clothes, and looks as if he would gladly be merry, if any kind body would teach him how!". Dispersed among the Bostonians are the Indians from the wilds of the forest and wild-looking groups of desperado-seamens,--appropriately enough (too appropriately, some readers might say) from the ship that is to carry Hester, Arthur and little Pearl away to freedom.

Hester is standing in a small, vacant circle in tense anticipation, the scarlet letter burning on her breast as it has never burned before when the sea-captain approaches to say that there will be another passenger on their voyage. The old physician has made arrangements to accompany them; he will also bring the young minister aboard. Before Hester can call her thoughts together the procession emerges from

the church. Among the magistrates in a place of honor walks
Arthur Dimmesdale. The eloquence and beauty of his sermon
have enshrined him in the hearts of his hearers forever.
"Never, on New England soil, had stood the man honored by
his mortal brethren as the preacher!" 1.

As he walks through the market-place he seems so
faint and weak that governor Bellingham moves to assist him,
but arriving in front of the scaffold the young minister
stops abruptly and stretches forth his arms.

"Hester," said he, "come hither! Come, my
little Pearl!" 2.

The child rushes towards him and clasps him by the knees but
before the mother can follow at a slower pace the old physi­
cian rushes forward and catches him by the arm.

"Madman, hold! what is your purpose?" whispered
he. "Wash back that woman! Cast off this child!
All shall be well! Do not blacken your fame and
perish in dishonor! I can yet save you! Would you
bring infamy on your sacred profession?"

"Ha, tempter! He thinks thou art too late!"
answered the minister, encountering his eye,
fearefully but firmly. "Thy power is not what it
was! With God's help I shall escape thee now!" 3.

Again he extends his hand to Hester, and with Pearl on the
other Hester supports him to the scaffold. Then with his
remaining strength he addresses the people of New England to
tell them why he stands there beside Hester and tell them
the true nature of the old physician who had plagued him.

2. Ibid. p. 233.
3. Ibid., pp. 233-4.
With a convulsive motion he tore away the ministerial band from before his breast. It was revealed! But it were irreverent to describe that revelation. For an instant the gaze of the horror-stricken multitude was concentrated on the ghastly miracle; while the minister stood, with a flush of triumph on his face, as one who, in the crisis of acutest pain, had won a victory. Then, down he sank upon the scaffold!1

Old Roger Chillingworth kneels beside him, muttering quietly.

"Thou hast escaped me!" he repeated more than once. "Thou hast escaped me!"

"May God forgive thee!" said the minister. "Thou too hast deeply sinned!"2

With that he turns to the small child at his side and in a voice that was gentle and almost sportive he asks her to kiss him now as she would not do in the forest.

Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up among human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world but be a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled.3

Hester bent toward him saying, "Shall we not spend our immortal life together? Surely, surely, we have ransomed one another with all this woe!"4

"Hush, Hester, hush!" said he with tremulous solemnity. "The law we broke,—the sin here so awfully revealed!—let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear! It may be that, when we forgot our God,—when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul,—it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an
of the latter view, however, must take into account the source.

that such a thing existed. Any conception about the validity
at all, and, in fact, the young minister had not even intimated
your men, who muttered, and that there was no mark on his breast
however,Hetty certainly men who were extremely devoted to the
mark on his breast. There were others in the same crowd,
that the remorse in his heart had eaten out to leave a trail

Remnants of horror clinging to, and still others stifled
others believed that it was placed on his breast by the no-

on himself in one of the desperate attempts at penitence!

some concluded that the minister had intimated the torture
others were not in agreement as to how it had gotten there.
token on the throat of the young minister’s breast, but given
witness to the scene and that there were, in truth, a scatter
his heart there were several expectantations. Most of those

as for the mark that the minister had exposed upon

depended entirely.

In the morning that followed so heavily after the
dark, when I could not at first find the room, the
breath out to a scream; deep voice of awe and won-
explaining the moment after that, when
that final word came forth, the minister’s

The will be done Paramount.

I had been loud forever! Throated be the news!
plied and staggered on the same moment been warded.
that death of the premonient fashion by the peo-
secrets at dead-heeled by phantoms me inherit, to die
shakers at red-heeled! My upbuilding me inherit, to die

smoke to breath upon my breast by someone your
all, In my extremity. My variant me the breaking
reestablish and pure reunion. God knows and he

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As for old Roger Chillingworth, it was less than a year before he died. After the death of the minister it seemed as if the vital life had been drawn from him and he shriveled and dried like a parasite that has been torn from its host.

Little Pearl fell heir to his great fortune and although we do not definitely know of her future, Hester soon left New England to return many years later, and Hawthorne would have us believe that she returned without Pearl, who had found a highly favorable marriage and home in some foreign land. But Hester Prynne returned to the little cottage by the sea shore.

...there was more real life for Hester Prynne here, in New England, than in that unknown region where Pearl had found a home. Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penance. She had returned, therefore, and resumed,—of her own free will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed it,—resumed the symbol of which we have now related so dark a tale. Never afterwards did it quit her bosom. But, in the lapse of the toilsome, thoughtful and self-devoted years that made up Hester's life, the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too.

We have quoted Hawthorne's conclusion to some extent because his own words illustrate most poignantly the final working out of the plot. In these words we see the final, the only possible resolution of the essential elements of

the situation. Hawthorne chose to throw his people into a situation that would demand the utmost of their faculties. In such a situation it was the basic underlying elements of their characters that they called upon. For Hester this was a woman's strength, for Arthur a weakness until the last moment when he was to find the strength to extricate them both. The final resolution is a reconciliation to moral law but it is a victory that can only come in the punishment of death,—immediate death for Arthur and for Hester the living analogue of death, sacrifice and renunciation.

The final scene returns to Hawthorne's platform stage and by thinking in dramatic terms we can further elucidate the final resolution of the plot. This final resolution contains two elements that Aristotle found necessary to excellence and drama: a recognition scene and a reversal of the situation, which can be separate but achieve their highest effect when coupled together. In The Scarlet Letter they are carefully linked in one scene which stands out before our eyes on the platform stage.

The denouement contains no physical recognition in the Aristotelian sense but on a deeper level it is for both Hester and Arthur a final recognition of their position in relation to the society into which they were born, its moral laws, the conscience that was bred into them and the past that weighs so heavily upon them. It is a realization that the final resolution of their torments can only come by accepting,
acknowledging, recognizing the burden of the past, the burden of conscience and building the future upon them. It also embodies a recognition that the path to victory and regeneration lies within the only society, the only moral law they can call home; lies in living or dying within that scheme of things, building on the past and not rejecting it. Such a recognition also means the facing of death, for it embodies the realization that their actions, their pride, guided by fate or will as they may have been, were sins that can only end in death, the punishment of death. Finally their recognition is an acceptance of this fact, an acceptance of their punishment, of the fact that their sins are deserving of such punishment. In this acceptance is the victory in death.

Coupled inherently with this recognition is a reversal of situation. Arthur Dimmesdale had reached the highest pinnacle of earthly fame that provincial New England could afford, escape with Hester lies in the offering when his situation is completely reversed and he dies in ignominy. For Hester the final triumph of her strength and pride, complete freedom from the obligation of punishment and a new life forged by her own will, lay only a step away when suddenly all vanishes into the air of living death. Where life was promised only death awaits.

The results of the two (recognition and reversal) cannot be separated,—the life and regeneration that arise from
recognition and reconciliation, and the death that follows reversal. We are reminded of the words of Calderon:

Who shall tell me if the Dramatic Muse
Which brings before the eye
Life in Death and Death in Life
Is Victory or Tragedy? 1

CONCLUSION

As we examined the final scene we said nothing of Hawthorne's use of symbol and association in relation to the end of the story. In the first place we must note that we have not delved deeply into these depths; we have only mentioned those symbols and associations that played the most important part in elucidating the course of the plot, the primary structural form. The symbolical intricacies of the novel open out on each new examination; even where we have examined closely we have only touched the surface. As for the level that we have touched we have left a final statement till now in order that we may see more clearly that the primary purpose is to strengthen and to shed light on the plot, the theme, the primary structural form.

Hawthorne has relied heavily on association, he has found likenesses in unlike, played objects against persons, persons against persons and objects against objects so that each has taken on a symbolical character. We find no constant equations as in allegory because of Hawthorne's interest in showing the unreliability of appearance, the likeness of opposites, the dissimilarity of likes. For instance, we have seen Hester Prynne associated with crime and evil, death, life, virility and saint-hood. From these associations, it is true,
we have discerned an inherent criticism of Puritan society and
Puritan moral law, but this criticism stands side by side with
the truth that Hester's reconciliation to that society is good.
The thing we must remember always, however, is that all these
associations do not take on real meaning until they are seen
in the light of the story of which they are a part. They re-
ceive their life, their meaning, their truth only when they
are a part of the tragedy of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dim-
meadale. At the same time this intricacy of symbol and as-

ociation adds poignancy and intensity to the action, the
story, as it unfolds before our eyes.

We can perhaps shed more light on this point by using
the example of little Pearl. Pearl, by her very existence,
takes on a vast symbolical intricacy of meaning for her mother
and for the people who live about her in Boston. At the death
of Arthur, Hawthorne makes the rather bold statement that now
Pearl can be a woman in the world. If we had read the story
thinking of Pearl as primarily a two fold symbol for first,
the scarlet letter, emblematic of Hester's punishment and
estrangement from society and second, a guide post leading to
Hester's reconciliation to that society, Hawthorne's statement
would indeed be a bold assertion that Pearl is no longer a
symbol but a girl. This, however, is not the case. Instead
Pearl has always been a very real little girl and she, like
all humans, needs some deep-felt experience to soften her and
make her human. Such is an experience some people never have;
Pearl is fortunate to lose it so early in life. Then too we must remember that the symbolical aspect of Pearl is placed upon her by others. Most of these aspects are the result of the traditional ideas about bastards reacting on the minds of a superstitious people with whom statute and scriptural law are the same. In the mind of Hester, who is obsessed by her sin, these ideas become even more poignant and grotesque. With Hester's acceptance of her sin and punishment, however, the torment of her mind ceases and with it goes the grotesque symbols that she has associated with Pearl.

In the case of Roger Chillingworth this is also true. Because we have seen him associated with Mistress Hibbins, The Black Man, the Devil himself,--as having in common with them a complete renunciation of moral obligations--we have seen him as a fiend that revolts against moral law and God and we can more easily accept his death after he is torn from his host. Hawthorne has carefully portrayed his monomania, his renunciation of all else for his fiendish revenge. Like a parasite his mental ability, his life blood are supplied from an outside source and when that source is gone he dies spiritually and physically. Again we must remember that he is most often a fiend in the eyes of Hester and Arthur and this gives us a clearer insight into their minds than into his.

In a word, the primary effect of Hawthorne's associations and symbols in the reader is, as we have shown here
and previously, to intensify the action, to make us feel more deeply the emotions, the torments, the fears and desires of the people who are living and acting before us.

These symbols and associations, then, are an integral part of the plot, the essential structural form. But Hawthorne's story is typified by a strong element of bareness and bleakness, a shallowness, a starvation even to the level of Hawthorne's choice of words. As Mr. Matthesen has pointed out this was a necessary result of Hawthorne's heritage and social environment. And, as we have shown, it clearly reflects the bareness and bleakness of Puritan New England. There is great danger, however, that the life, the illusion of felt life will be starved right out of the story and the emotional response of the reader will be buried under the intellectual theorizing that grows from the symbol and association. To counteract this danger Hawthorne carefully uses his symbol and association to bolster the action and the felt life in the action.

This much, however, is still not enough to eliminate the danger completely, and Hawthorne borrows from the dramatist to give the final form and structure and the final illusion of felt life to his story. He places his people at once directly in contact with the heart of the situation and gives that situation such magnitude that it demands their utmost efforts to meet it. People in such situations are not rounded characters for they have fallen back upon the deepest, the
strongest elements of their personalities in their hour of need. Such characters are not objectionable in the drama but we are surprised to find them in a novel.

As the story progresses Hawthorne never relaxes the tension on his people for a moment. The only relief that he provides is a symbol-fraught narrative that will serve to intensify the emotions when the action resumes. He does not use the novelist's privilege of enlarging the area of his story and thus relieving tension. Instead when he ties his story to society and views that society he is at the same time increasing the tension of the plot.

Finally Hawthorne even uses the devices of recognition and reversal, that are the heart of the structural form of the drama, to resolve his plot. He even goes so far as to place his most important actions on a stage before the eyes of the reader.

It is in this way that Hawthorne remains true to the severe and starved society of provincial New England, makes his story an integral part of that society, gives it emotional magnitude and still invests it with depth upon depth of meaning and significance.

We have made only one of many possible approaches to the structural form of The Scarlet Letter. Our approach has found the story to be a dramatic tragedy in novel form. We have shown the relation of the major structural elements to this form. Our final purpose has been to aid the general
reader to find more meaning, more depths of emotion and intellectual experience than had previously been his. Again we must say that our words are only one small step, among many other, towards an infinite,—the full potential experience that is The Scarlet Letter.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


1. In addition to the sources cited in the footnotes I have listed only those works that have contributed most to the development of this thesis.

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