Engendering Empathy for the De-gendered: Hawthorne in The Scarlet Letter

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Introduction. Domesticity, sentimentality, and sympathy:
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It has been well known, especially since Tompkins’s re-evaluation of
them, that the sentimental fictions by female writers such as Catharine
Sedgwick (1789–1867), Lydia Sigourney (1791–1865), and Lydia Maria
Child (1802–80) were circulated in the marketplace of the nineteenth-
century America to the extent that Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64)
 teased the authors by dubbing them “d-d scribblers” (qtd. in Smith 7)
 and scoffed at their mean sentimentality and overemphasis on sympathy.
The genuine tone of this cocky remark seems contradictory, for he seems
to have been dependent on sentimentality and sympathy, just as the female
writers were. It is sentimentality, not religiously esoteric terminology,
that lets Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale convince not a few virgins of the sup-
posedly dogmatic Calvinism in his Sabbath sermon; it is by sentimentality
and sympathy, not the sheer eloquence of the minister, that “the souls of
the listening audience had been borne aloft” (248).¹ Hester Prynne’s ex-
husband, Roger Chillingworth, threatens her by saying, “I shall seek this man, as I have sought truth in books . . . . There is a sympathy that makes me conscious of him. I shall see him tremble . . . .” (75) (my italics). The way the author depicts the denouement in which the reverend reveals the letter A inscribed upon his own flesh is so sentimental that the awe and sympathy of the congregation toward him compel them to bear witness to the revelation in his favor.

While sympathy becomes negotiable only when the sympathizer has a sensibility, it is compatible with sentiment. Sentiment has been derided to and bewilderingly overemphasized with its mawkish facet in connection with the separation of gender-specific fields (men for work, women for domestic duties), partly because “[b]y the middle of the nineteenth century . . . American sentimentality seemed to have become ensconced solely in a feminine ‘world of love and ritual,’ in ‘the empire of the mother’” (Chapman and Hendler 3), and partly because Matthiessen and Lewis, two bigwigs in twentieth century-literary criticism, appraised the anti-domestic American Adam, or the revolutionary maverick, and ignored the sentimental and feminine.

Faithful to the norm of the separate sphere and keen for the contemporary proclivity for sentimental novels, women writers in the nineteenth century concentrated their attention on family, and so did Hawthorne. He instills in The Scarlet Letter the nineteenth-century domestic ideology in which the household was regarded as a sacred place immune to the outside world of lust, the world of cannibal capitalism. To “form an electric chain” (153) of family, mock family though it may be, he makes Dimmesdale, Hester, and Pearl stand together hand in hand on the scaffold in the middle of the night. When Hester endures the punishment of standing alone on the scaffold with her little baby in her bosom, Hawthorne inserts the comment that she would remind Catholics of “the image of Divine Maternity” (56). If read from the feminist’s perspective, The Scarlet Letter might be labeled as “the story of salvation through motherly love” (Tompkins 83), the kind of story that his contemporary women writers and readers were inclined and eager to catch; and Hawthorne should be counted among “the sentimental novelists,” who,
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according to a twentieth-century feminist, "elaborated a myth that gave women the central position of power and authority in the culture" (Tompkins 83).

Were there any differences between the female sentimental novelists and Hawthorne? One of the differences seems to lie in how much trust is to be put in the patriarchic family when writing sentimental novels. The female sentimental novelists dedicated themselves to compilation of "the summa theologia of nineteenth-century America's religion of domesticity" (Tompkins 83), valorized the established binary way of thinking—maternity vs. paternity and feminine vs. masculine—and kept their footing on the patriarchic family no matter how fragile the real patriarchic family was. On the contrary, Hawthorne seems to have suspected that the very foundation of the sentimental novels by female writers might ruin the apparently sacred patriarchic family; substantiating the view that the American quest romance could be categorized as a counter-traditional genre that subverts patriarchal norms, not one designated as masculine or patriarchal. Another difference lies in the problem of whom to feel sympathetic toward. In Hawthorn's romance, Hester is allowed to push on from the subordinate position, the position of lack (to use the well-known word of Lacan psychology), to reach the status of subject, the position denied to the lack (women), and as a result to replace the semantics of the dogmatically and therefore patriarchically defined letter 'A,' and thus to subvert the patriarchic system. Just as the popular women writers and their readers, middle-class housewives and daughters, symbolically united with their heroines, the author might symbolically manage to unite with the tragic heroine and feel content—if his final goal had been set on the victory of the subaltern, i.e., the brave woman. This question remains to be answered. If Hawthorne would still hold an anxiety that defines him as a social loser when his heroine becomes vocal and successfully slips out of the status of subaltern, then he would feel it difficult to stay sympathetic for Hester and to share the same sentiment that only the victimized could bear. This suspicion gets etymological support from the word, sympathy: it is composed of two parts: syn- (syn-) / co- meaning together, and -pathy, pathos, distressfulness, sadness.
By explaining who, in *The Scarlet Letter*, could be conceivably designated in as a subaltern that deserves the author's sympathy, I will clarify the personal grounds that compel the author to delve into and to deconstruct the sentimental area, the area off-limits to the canonical *straight* male writers, and to let slip an irresistible upsurge of sympathy for the subaltern.

I. Setting up the patriarchic family

First and foremost, one has to make sure of where the author locates the arena of *The Scarlet Letter*: is it exactly the same domestic area that the contemporary women writers occupy? In looking at this problem, Roger Chillingworth appears to be a very critical character.

Submitting tamely to his fate as a captive of Indians and disguising himself as a magician at the risk of drawing suspicion that he is a servant of the devil who deserves being burned alive, Chillingworth sacrifices everything for the sole purpose of gaining medical knowledge unknown to the western scholars: he sacrifices everything except the domestic bliss he thinks he is qualified to ask his wife to comply with. He innocently overestimates Hester, whose "nuptial smile" he thinks embodies the "fire-light of their home" (176), and he earnestly confesses: "My heart was a habitation large enough for many guests, but lonely and chill, and without a household fire. I longed to kindle one" (74). His reference to the parlor and the fireplace is worth noting, for the parlor was not only the place to invite respectable guests but also a kind of index of middle-class status that soothed the class-anxiety of householders in the volatile society of nineteenth-century America, and the fireplace, around which family members gathered, was indispensable for them to generate their inviolably sacred family circle. This particularly nineteenth-century ideology seems to be infiltrated and condensed in *The Scarlet Letter*, probably deliberately by the author, who must have been heartened by "[t]he principles of the bourgeois family, [which] as the heart of middle-class ethics, are consistently upheld in America writing . . ." (Jehlen 141).

That confession of Chillingworth's testifies to his origin of anger,
anger at the young talented minister who robs him of his domestic bliss; the bliss, he erroneously thinks, due to those in the patriarchic/phallic position. This anger is incited by his deposal from the patriarchic/phallic position by the minister, and perhaps Chillingworth knows that the anger is justified only if he misuses “the Puritan’s belief that marriage most closely mirrored the relation between God and man”; that “[t]he covenant between God and his people was reflected in the one between man and wife, and on that rested all larger covenanted associations”; that “[t]he family provided the prototype for both church and state, and the position of men as fathers justified them as fathers in the state” (Lang 41). When ousted from the patriarchic position in his own family, he loses everything in society, including his socially defined sexual status, and not surprisingly bears an irrepressible grudge against the paramour. As Berlant indicates (119), his pertinacious anger, justifiably cloaked behind the Puritan doctrine/the Law/the Reason, is filled again and again with, to use the Freudian jargon, libidinous energy. When directed positively, the libidinous energy goes to the medical treatment of Dimmesdale, but when deranged into the negative, it runs amok on his enemy/patient.

The Law/the Reason and its identical counterpart, masculinity—though there seems to be no necessity to directly interconnect these elements, we will admit it for the temporary benefit of bringing in a working hypothesis—are, in Lacanian psychology, subsumed into the realm of the Symbolic, where theoretically there is no room for irrationality like Chillingworth’s insatiable anger.\(^2\) The trick of how this enables him to so easily hide his irrationality is found in a seeming aura of three entwined phases that he emits: X, X’, and Y.

\[
X = [\text{whole}: \text{omnipotent}(?) : \text{masculine}(?) : \text{godlike}: \text{rational}]
\]

\[
X' = [\text{quasi-whole}: \text{quasi-omnipotent}: \text{—}: \text{devilish}: \text{despot}: \text{irrational}]
\]

\[
X' = X \text{ is tinged with } Y.
\]

\[
Y = [\text{lack}/\text{hole}: \text{impotent}: \text{unmanned}: \text{—}: \text{—}: \text{irrational}]
\]

His personality is not so simply constituted as to be definable by an alternative choice, but it can be defined within synthetic terms that permit the possibility of his being both X/X’ and Y, i.e., a queer black
(w)hole. Enveloped in the darkness of the black whole, what looms up behind him is the illusive patriarchic nuclear family, not the genuine (if it can be so termed) one that he has not been able to create. In the sphere of the domestic black whole, the heimlich (homelike) transforms into the unheimlich (unhomelike), the usual transforms into the unusual, and the religious transforms into the sacrilegious. This means in extension that the following are established and, not paradoxically, collapsed at the same time: the law that fixes the meaning of adultery on the letter A, or, in Lacanian terms, the hegemony of the Word / Law / Logos writ large, and the principle of identity and causality. Therefore, the patriarchic Puritan society keeps imposing its own semantics of the letter A on the bodice of Hester’s gown, while her A has lost original meaning, cancerously multiplied acquired meanings such as Angel and Able, circulated in the community, and undercut the authority and authenticity of the patriarchy. In this failed patriarchy, the rational subject in modern humanism, i.e., the self-reliant man, the ideal being that Emerson claimed would turn not-man (and un-man in terms of gender)/Devil or the Black Man, the name by which Chillingworth is referred to—the cognomen that does justice to him in his own self-reflection: “Was I not, though you might deem me cold, nevertheless a man thoughtful for others, craving little for himself”—“kind, true, just, and of constant, if not warm affections”; a “mortal man, with once a human heart,[who] has become a fiend for his especial torment?” (172)

II. Gauging the devilish patriarchic power in the domestic black (w)hole

The old physician stays ever vigilant for a peek into his innermost psyche, and for the minutest change of Dimmesdale, his psychosomatic patient doomed “to eat his unsavory morsel always at another’s board” and “to warm himself only at another’s fireside,” and yet with “his concord of paternal and reverential love” (125) (my italics), he helps Dimmesdale to recuperate medically. What makes it possible for him to playact as a father substitute is not so much the historically derived mode of the seventeenth-century family as the author’s covert induction of the
close affectionate family relationship applauded loudly in the nineteenth-century middle class. In the nascent capitalistic society of nineteenth-century America, men were urged to go out for work, while the family, deemed as a sacred though exclusive haven, protected against the vile competitive world, was to be helpful in creating the close-knit relation between husband and wife, parents and children. In the ghetto-like, autistic sphere of this nuclear family, the supreme order was to get rid of the slightest emotional differences, to directly articulate one's emotions and make them easily understood, to avoid strangers, and to turn one's back on the outside world. It is this insulated sphere of family, the emotionally close and therefore markedly modern oedipal family, that Chillingworth misuses to pressure his substitute son Dimmesdale into obeying to his wicked suggestions, and to successfully become the (quasi-)omnipotent, tyrannical, and (ir)rational God-like/devilish father in the domestic black (w)hole. He loses no opportunity to sting the conscience of the minister and to lead him into confession: for instance, he insinuates to him that he is privy to the secret concerning the affair with Hester, saying, “if they [those who will not confess] seek glorify God, let them not lift heavenward their unclean hands! If they would serve their fellow-men, let them do it by making manifest the power and reality of conscience, in constraining them to penitential self-abasement!” (133) No doubt the cunning physician is well aware of the American idiosyncrasy that persisted and dominated from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, namely, that the Covenant should not be made between God and each individual, but between God and the community. This feature, or Americanized Puritanism if you wish to call it so, is confirmed by three historical facts, i.e.: that Ann Hutchinson, who was labeled and persecuted as a witch, was severely criticized for her antinomianism, or her claim for the need of direct individual contact with God (Lang 36-37); that the solidarity of the community had to outweigh the individual; and that, in contrast to Europe, sons in America were tacitly forbidden to pull down their revered fathers who had set the footings for the new communities in the wilderness of the New World (Berlant 132). If Chillingworth did not know these facts, he would feel it
difficult to impose on his substitute son Dimmesdale the rigid Puritan doctrine, and to dissuade him from accepting the passionate Hester's audacious claim of "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so each other! Have thou forgotten it?" (195)

According to Freud, not until the death does the father become a raging superego and behave tyrannically in the sphere of the unconscious of his son. Roger Prynne (the true name of Roger Chillingworth), who is rumored to be shipwrecked and as good as dead, transforms into, if not exactly the super-ego, the rigorous being, and mercilessly afflicts Dimmesdale, who becomes extremely sensitive to his own Chillingworth's inner voice. As we have already mentioned, the relation between God and the Puritans can be compared to the relation between the patriarch and his family members—the old physician preempts Freud's theory and misuses it—so that the minister cannot resist Chillingworth, the inner transmitter of God's injunction and order. The oedipal effect on *The Scarlet Letter* has actually been verified by Crews, and also confirmed by Erlich, with her painstaking inspection of the author's boyhood, especially his pecuniary and emotional dependence on his uncle, his father substitute. To follow up this matter with them would digress from the purpose of this paper.

What if the cunning (quasi-)patriarch loses the anchorage of his present status, i.e., the male gender? The body gets its specific meaning, in the patriarchal policy of gender construction that defines the power system; therefore if deprived of the male gender, another kind of physicality hitherto unrevealed emerges upfront, as Kristeva shows. The excessive physicality presents itself, replaces the de-corporealized physicality that the men in the hegemonic position boast of, and renders them unable to differentiate themselves from the women, the inferior—so they believe—beings who are regarded physically prominent and who they erroneously think stand in a critical position where they are easily reduced to a state of prostitution. If Chillingworth's excessive body was good to look at when revealed, then there would be no problem. Distinguished by "his low, dark, misshapen figure" (136), his body is compared to the medical herbs that he collects zealously, the "herbs, with such a
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dark, flabby leaf,” and to “a barren and blasted spot, where, in due course of time, would be seen deadly nightshade, dogwood, henbane, and whatever else of vegetable wickedness the climate could produce, all flourishing with hideous luxuriance” (176)—the very opposite of Pearl, his ex-wife’s daughter conceived by her paramour. Mocking the symbolic meaning of her name Pearl, the pure glacial white, she radiates the splendor of “Ruby,” “Coral,” and “Red Rose,” and thus represents vivacity: “if in any of her changes, she had grown fainter or paler, she would have ceased to be herself;—it would have been no longer Pearl” (90). In contrast, Chillingworth is suspected, by his own ex-wife, of “blight[ing]...the tender grass of early spring, and show[ing] the wavering track of his footsteps, sere and brown, across the cheerful verdure” (175), and thus exposed are his depleted vital energy, sterility, and impotence. In these euphemistic words of Hester’s, he is denied the possibility of becoming the biological father, forced to give up the hope of creating the patriarchal nuclear family, and meekly admits to Hester, “Misshapen from my birth-hour, I did delude myself with the idea that intellectual gifts might veil physical deformity in a young girl’s fantasy” (74).

Noting that Chillingworth has placed too much trust in the knowledge of science, the Western science rooted deeply in and motivated by the desire to conquer the unknown, three historical facts can be cited as relevant when considering his acquisition and forfeiture of male gender. First, in the Renaissance, midwives were deprived of the training in obstetrics that was provided to the students of university medical departments and they were taken to task as witches for their doings, by complicity of the patriarchal elitists consisting of nations, churches, and universities (Elbert 71-73). Second, Chillingworth’s contemporary, the English philosopher and politician, Francis Bacon, was “a central force behind the institutionalization of science” (Elbert 71), and Chillingworth might have met Bacon before going to the New World. In the pre-Renaissance there was an English scientist and philosopher, with the same first name as Roger, Roger Francis Bacon; hence Chillingworth could be the two Bacons combined. Third, during the author’s life in the
nineteenth century, the advancing field of gynecology revealed the secrets of reproduction and went so far as to permit prevalence of suspicious operations such as clitoridectomies.

Indeed, having a great knowledge of the bodily function whilst being under its control, especially female reproductive function, may let Chillingworth enjoy, even though indirectly, his patriarchal power and repress his inferiority complex of impotence, but his wife's actions—giving her heart to Dimmesdale and having a baby from her extramarital affair—drive him home to his impotence and inability to retrieve her love, to the realization that his scientific knowledge, the knowledge he has been proud of, is no longer alluring to her. His ugly corporeality, which he thinks he has gotten over, resurfaces in his consciousness and begins to gnaw at him. Having occupied the privileged position of subject—the position conferred only upon the patriarch in the androcentric society, and having enjoyed his power of putting Dimmesdale, his patient, under his surveillance, the old physician becomes demoted into the position of subaltern, a mere object; and those readers of The Scarlet Letter apt to insatiately pursue freaky objects peruse his unsightly body with curious eyes.

This phenomenon in which the ugly corporeality and will of life-conservation spontaneously revive must be analyzed along the lines of Kristeva, the feminist scholar of Lacanian psychology. The revival of the ugly corporeality means the following. First, the (male) subject regresses to the sphere which, for the establishment of his male subjectivity, he has anxiously denied and purged from his consciousness, the sphere directly related to his life—supporting bodily activities such as taking food, giving out excrement, having intercourse, and getting offspring, in a word, the sphere of abject / maternal / female body. Second, this regress to the maternal / female area signifies that the male subject forfeits his male gender, destabilizes the patriarchic position, and is likely to become instead a threatening phallic mother. The above-mentioned phenomenon, therefore, is a trigger for the subversion of the Law of God / Father / father in the patriarchic family, and the displacement of the father, and even God the Father, from the patriarchic family (Madoff 52). In this
way the text modulates from the adultery-blaming authoritative mode to the F/father-censoring derogative mode, disclosing that the old physician is the queer patriarch-turned-phallic-mother.

III. Plumbing the black hole of the patriarchic family

III. A. The definition of phallic mother

“The man whom [Dimmesdale] had most vilely wronged!—and who had grown to exist only by his perpetual poison of the direst revenge! . . . A mortal man, with once a human heart, has become a fiend for his especial torment” (172). In this way, Chillingworth hurls at his ex-wife his anger against the adulterer, not realizing that his uncontrollable anger removes him further and further from the patriarchic position, and ushers him, ironically enough, nearer and nearer to the very opposite of the patriarch he longs to be, i. e., the phallic mother. Before supplying a definition for the phallic mother, it may be worth pointing out, by way of contrast, the degree of Hester’s phallic-motherness.

Aside from her position as the guilty being, the abject being, or the other being separate from puritan society, Hester is the mother of the illicit child, Mother. Hester’s raison d’être as the Great Mother is provided in relation not merely to her illicit child, but also to her paramour Dimmesdale, who implores her: “Think for me, Hester! Thou art strong. Resolve for me.” (196) Dimmesdale needs her help since he is emaciated mentally as well as physically: “His nerve seemed absolutely debased. His moral force was abased into more than childish weakness. It groveled helpless on the ground . . .”(159). It becomes clear that Hester and Dimmesdale are not on mature or heterosexual terms, nor the androcentric terms that the sexist might be prone to create; rather, that they rather slide into the primitive umbilical binary of mother and child, in which she manifests herself in front of him as if she possessed overriding power and represented everything [as if she were phallic].

Hester’s phallic-motherness is confirmed when we see the common factor in the two women, Hester and Hibbins, the former who begins to hold liberal ideas springing up in Europe at that time, and the latter who is to be executed for witchcraft. These two can be described as the other
being, separate from the Puritan community, because both are the viragoes/phallic mothers with an impetuous temper, rebellious to the patriarchic oligarch, persistently true to their own beliefs, infringers of the Law of God the Father and the law of the father of this world, subversive to the patriarchic order.

From the viewpoint of mythology, it is said that “the rise of patriarchy is marked by tales of heroes ... conquering serpents or dragons of darkness” (Williams 132). Advocating the theory that the parricide in the myth of Oedipus is “the necessary evil upon which civilization was founded”—a theory disparaged by some later feminist readers for its “repression of the mother” that lies at the root of Western civilization itself”—Freud indicates that the myth tells of “the encounter between a mortal man and a female serpent-like creature, the Sphinx, the monster. The monster is “an embodiment of tellurian motherhood, the feminine right of the earth in its dark aspect ... .” (Williams 132–33). The behavior of the seventeenth-century Puritans in The Scarlet Letter—identifying Hester and Hibbins with the abject beings in the community, and excluding them—supports and bears out what these scholars have indicted. Hester herself is not unaware of an existence of some terrifying being parasitic within her own psyche because “she hid the secret from herself, and grew pale whenever it struggled out of her heart, like a bosom serpent from its hole” (80). If one emulates the style of Edelman, the queer critic (65, 24–75), one can safely say that the men in the prerogative position preempt the possible rebellion of the phallic mothers by punishing [i.e., symbolically castrating] and ousting them from society: in short, downgrading them into the other beings separate from the society, or subalterns. In the patriarchy, the women are forbidden to trespass the sphere off-limits to women, or, in Lacan’s words, the realm of the symbolic, i.e., Languages/Letters/Alphabets (including the letter A), and forced to remain a necessary evil to implement, to borrow Sedgwick’s jargon, the homosocial relationship in the patriarchy. The men in the prerogative position need them to make their fragile male gender identity secure. In the process of establishing their male identity, they visualize the other beings or the phallic mothers as they
want to, putting them under surveillance, reducing them to the status of material, lifeless objects that satisfy men’s desire to rule them, negating the value of the other beings / the phallic mothers, and thus indirectly upgrading their status as the men. This is the very application of the Hegelian dialectic of sublation through negation.

III. B. Who is the phallic mother?
The properties of the phallic mother in question are described as those of snakes and witches. Theologically, both snakes and witches are very cunning (see fig. 1); servants of the devil, opponents of Christians—Christians apparently pious but easily yielding to temptations. Not to mention, the snake / witch image is gender specific—men the allured, and women the alluring—and disastrous to the homosocially bonded patriarchy. In anthropology and psychology, the being fated to be conquered by the young hero is the snake / monstrous female / phallic mother / devouring vagina, which is exactly what Chillingworth becomes in The Scarlet Letter as we shall shortly see. There occurs some ironical turnaround in which some properties of the phallic mother are in a deviant way transferred from Hester and Hibbins to Chillingworth. When undergoing the punishment of exposing herself with the letter A and her baby on the scaffold in front of the congregation, Hester keenly observes Chillingworth’s face and perceives that a “writhing horror twisted itself across his features, like a snake gliding swiftly over them, and making one little pause, with all its wreathed intervals in open sight” (61) (my italics). She happens to see “the old physician” as witchlike, “with a basket on one arm, and a staff in the other hand, stooping along the ground, in quest of roots and herbs to concoct his medicines withal” (167). The mechanism that permits this transformation of Chillingworth is explained along the lines of Kristeva’s psychoanalysis: under Hester’s piercing scrutiny, Chillingworth’s ugly, impotent corporeality overrides the intellectuality and knowledge of science that he mistakenly believes override his ugly, impotent, corporeality; deprived of intellectuality, his personality is directly bound to the functions of preserving his own body, such as taking provisions, discharging excretions,
having intercourse, and procreating offspring (impotent though he seems); he becomes a mere living thing, or worse, reduced into a mass of flesh or a mere matter/abject mother/phallic mother/terrifying other being. If there resided in Chillingworth a kind of love, love in the “normal” sense—what is “normal” is for the moment held in suspense—then his seeming sordidness in the primary bodily function would be somewhat attenuated, but unfortunately there is none of that kind of love in Chillingworth. His malfunctioning body becomes markedly visible, his ugliness necessarily emphasized. Hence the whole / un-castrated, potent / heterosexual, masculine corporeality is replaced by the queer (neither / both manly nor / and womanly) corporeality that sticks to the old physician, and robs him of the male gender identity.

When we pay attention to the findings of cultural studies, we may dimly see some socio-historical background that spurs Chillingworth’s gender conversion. Douglas and Brodhead postulate that in nineteenth century America, the housewife created the empire of the mother and embodied the angel in the house, the moral mentor to her children and husband. While this standing of the middle-class home affected the contemporary writers like Hawthorne and Melville, this postulation by Douglas and Brodhead seems to overlook how the male member (husband and father) in the middle-class home behaved and changed on both actual and emotional levels. On the actual level, “the authority of the English patriarch had given way to the Lockean ideal of the ‘natural family,’ in which the mutual rights and obligations of mother and children were balanced against those of the father” (Dalke 191). Judging from this, a portent of feminization must already have been beginning to eclipse the powers of the patriarch, and Hawthorne have detected this. Hence the author ironically converged the old physician’s yearning for retrieving the patriarch position and reconfirming the male gender identity into the unexpected consequence of identifying with the queer phallic mother.5

III. C. The perverse sexuality in the ghastly body
The phallic mother reigns over “a dimension of self that is not
formed according to the cultural structure of [patriarchal] Law." This is a pre-Oedipal primitive dimension, Kristeva's semiotic dimension, of "the developing not-yet-self," identified with "neither mind nor body, essence nor substance, nature nor culture," and still more importantly, "male nor female, but rather a [gender-free] mixture, a creation of them all" (Williams 158). As a matter of course, the phallic mother also manifests close affinity with and is generous to homosexual love. The problem to be solved here is how homosexually related the phallic-motherly physician is to the minister, while the former, as we have seen in the chapter II of this thesis, covertly playacts in the latter's psyche as the puritanical father /(vicarious for) angry God the Father / the super-ego (see fig. 2).

In examining this problem of Chillingworth, it is helpful to monitor the volatile identity of Dimmesdale, his homosexual partner-to-be, who in the public may properly perform his role as sacred father for the congregation, but who in his miserable, private bachelor life endures the pressure to "select some one of the many blooming damsels, spiritually devoted to him, to become his devoted wife" and thrust it aside, "as if priestly celibacy were one of his article's of his church-discipline" (125). Taking advantage of this bigotry of the minister's, the old physician so arranges that "the two [may] be lodged in the same house," . . . and that "every ebb and flow of the minister's life-tide [may] pass under the eye of his anxious and attached physician" (125) (my italics). The two are homoerotically attracted, in a manner described to look sentimental or otherwise mocking:

. . . these two men, so different in age, came gradually to spend much time together . . . [T]hey took long walks on the sea-shore, or in the forest; mingling various talk with the plash and the murmur of the waves, and the wind-anthem among the tree-tops. Often, likewise, one was the guest of the other, in his place of study and retirement. There was a fascination for the minister in the company of the man of science . . . (123) (my italics)

Chillingworth is successful in emasculating Dimmesdale into a bashful virgin who physically accepts her lover for the first time. In the following extract, virginity is likened to an "iron framework," and giving it to
a man is likened to "open[ing]" "a window":

[It] would always be essential to his peace to feel the pressure of a
faith about him, supporting, while it confined him within its iron
framework. Not the less however, though *with a tremulous enjoyment*,
did he feel the occasional relief of looking at the universe through
the medium of another kind of intellect . . . . It was as if *a window
were thrown open, admitting a freer atmosphere into the close and
stifled study, where his life was wasting itself away . . . .* (123) (my
italics)

Virtually letting slip a good opportunity to reclaim the patriarchic
position and to reaffirm his male gender identity, Chillingworth seems
to know that he has to attenuate his rage against the paramour. It
follows then that he himself stands at a very critical point where, if not
careful, he could be regarded as a dangerous element to the patriarchy
that bases itself on sexism and compulsory heterosexual love, the
patriarchy that he depends on to achieve his aim of punishing the
minister.

It is worth discussing the difference in degree and in kind between
the virago-like Hester and the homosexual Chillingworth. Both are
compared to phallic mothers, but the former is visible, and the latter
invisible. Hester puts the letter A "[o]n the breast of her gown, in fine
red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic
flourishes of gold thread" (53), drawing attention from the congregation,
and fixing that image on the their retinas, in part because scarlet is
the color sported by prostitutes, and in part because, as long as the
scarlet associates with whores, she could be designated as such a being—
a being physically subservient to the licentious men, or a being with un-
controllable sexuality. Note, however, that Hester remains heterosexual
as long as she is compared to a whore, thus, she retains her place within
the heterosexually based patriarchy. (To the men in hegemonic position
of the society, her existence is a necessary evil to keep their stratifica-
tion working.) She represents women at large, the women erroneously
defined as ungovernable sexuality, who need to be ruled and surveyed by
the men in the prerogative position. How about the men who, like
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Chillingworth, are elite but homosexual? As some queer critics, Sedgwick for instance, indicate, in the apparently heterosexually based patriarchy, the existence of the homosexual is required just as that of the sexually excessive female like Hester. In order to keep the patriarch secure, the self-styled heterosexual men feel it necessary to forge an alliance with the homosexual men and to keep a subtle balance with them. This maneuver can be taken safely, as long as the latter is invisible. Sedgwick explains, “in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desires and the structures of maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (25). To cope with this condition and to secure their own survival in the basically heterosexual society, the homosexuals endow themselves with an “unnerving (and strategically manipulable) capacity to ‘pass’” (Edelman 4). This invisibility is threatening to the compulsory hetero-sexual patriarchy, but thanks to this capacity, the homosexual can manage to avoid, unlike women and colored races, being markedly represented as the other beings, and manage to conform to the norm defining the condition of the men in the prerogative position. In order to stay in the Lacanian prerogative field of the Symbolic—the field of the patriarchic Order, Language, Law—the straights as well as the homosexuals must contain and suppress their corporeality and excessive sexuality by dumping them on others, i.e., women (to which one must add, black slaves, and immigrant laborers like the Irish, the author’s contemporary others). The men of oligarchic power in the seventeenth-century New England, including the queer Chillingworth, must have known that, as Butler cogently points out in her summary of Foucault’s theory, “[s]exuality is an historically specific organization of power, discourse, and affectivity” (92), and that “[t]he field of sexuality” “is always, under patriarchy, implicated in, and productive of, though by no means identical with, the field of power relations” (Edelman 6). Should the queers go astray from the norm and become visible, they would clarify the open secret of the patriarchy as a homosocial alliance between the self-styled straight and the queer, and the patriarchic community would become panic-stricken and find no other effective alternative but to pogrom them.
Unwittingly coming out to be *visible* in terms of sexual identity and textually exposed as the mighty *black [w]hole*, phallic mother, and queer, Chillingworth stands at the stake, where the harder he strives to retrieve his patriarchal male gender identity, the farther it eludes him, and where, if negligent, he would confront the possibility of being the pogrom victim. Perhaps from the outset he knows this double bind, while threatening his ex-wife, he implores her: “Enough, it is my purpose to live and die unknown. Let, therefore, thy husband be to the world as the one already dead, and of whom no tidings shall ever come. Recognize me not, by word, by sign, by look! . . . Should thou fail me in this, beware! His fame, his position, his life, will be in my hands. Beware!” (76) Though unintentionally merging his initial aim of retrieving his patriarchic position with that of maintaining the queer relation with the minister, he keeps striving for his initial aim only to find himself neither a real sexual subject nor a socially sanctioned subject. Wise though he is, his failure is probably due to his oversight of the following blunder: he is driven to pursue the aim of retrieving his patriarchic position not by his own conscious will but by the patriarchic ideology; the ideology is based on the compulsory heterosexual norm and, to use Derrida’s terminology, the phallogocentric principle; he is caged in the paradigm created in this ideology and doomed to live it out; and insofar as he remains a member of the patriarchic community, it is almost impossible to think, act, and desire independently from it.

Now, let us turn to a similarity that the old physician and author share, and a difference that lies between them. Chillingworth erases his former patriarchic position as the husband of Hester, hides his true identity from the public, and thus surrenders his patriarchic masculinity to become what Kristeva calls the *abject*. Hawthorne, on the other hand, symbolically loses his patriarchic position when he is fired from the customhouse; in a sense he is beheaded / castrated, and becomes a socially worthless being, or rather, the *abject*. His Puritan ancestors, it seems to him, are scornful of him: “Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!” (10) Though the old physician and author go along different procedures, both are the *abject*, and the author suggests
the homosocial link between himself and Chillingworth in the description of tapestry in the minister's boarding room. The tapestry "represent[s] the Scriptural story of David and Bathsheba (see fig. 3), and Nathan the Prophet, but . . . made the fair woman of the scene almost as grimly picturesque as the woe-denouncing seer" (126). The picture portrays Nathan denouncing David for fooling Uriah out of his wife Bathsheba by leading him to his death in battle. While it reminds us of the love triangle among Chillingworth, Dimmesdale, and Hester, whose biblical counterparts are Uriah / Nathan, David, and Bathsheba, respectively, the tapestry directs us to the link between the physician and the author because of the association of <Nathan / Chillingworth> with <Nathaniel Hawthorne>. This strange link between the two shall be discussed as the conclusion of this thesis.

IV. The author's effusion toward corporeality and gender

Since their colonization of New England, Puritans had a typological mindset that was likely to conflate their actual afflictive lives with the symbolic realization of the prophesy of the Testament. The American Utopia was to be founded on the basis of utility and to be "ruled by industry" (Takayanagi 180), but the Puritans felt irritated by the delay or the impossibility of building the actual Utopia. Repeatedly expressing their grief in the form of the Jeremiad, they made a kind of ideology from this grief, and through this ideology they tried to consolidate their solidarity. The Jeremiad was seen to have lasted at least to the mid-century (Bercovitch 153). In 1850, the year when The Scarlet Letter was published, William Arthur, the ambitious young lawyer rising to political prominence, stood up before a group of auditors commemorating Independence Day and delivered a speech that smacked of the Jeremiad and nascent capitalism: "[The American] is more fertile in expediency, more steadfast in purpose, more indomitable of soul, more energetic, more bold and aspiring, than his European predecessors or their contemporaries . . . Like the disc of the sun, his own system is without blemish, lustrous and vitalizing!" (Bercovitch 151). In this American ideology, one can see the value that Americans attached to
labor and industry, the overemphasis of aggressive will, and the need for the robust physique: the qualities assumed to be masculine at that time, and the strength required to promote the westward movement of Manifest Destiny and outdo the Europeans. There lay a covert common factor that linked the white-collar class to the immigrant working class with this kind of masculinity in the nineteenth century, when masculinity itself, especially the morally robust masculine will, was on the brink of extinction. In fact, morally degraded ministers, philanthropists, social reformers were deplorably rampant; the traditionally rigid Calvinistic conception of virtue and vice became unstable; in a word, sensational telltale writers, George Lippard, for instance, the author of Quaker City, did not feel it difficult to ferret for topics, and Hawthorne was not insensitive to worldly affairs, as Reynolds, the cultural researcher, makes clear. Men at large, whether in the white-collar class or immigrant working class, must have sensitively reacted to this crisis. Urged by a political unconscious largely formed by their anxious fear of losing androcentric power, they acted in exact accordance with the principle that “the obsessive-compulsive neurosis enables power maneuvering,” and “forged a sacred [homsocial] alliance” and “unanimously participated in it” (Baudrillard 33).

Paradoxically, Hawthorne was more closely attracted to thus forged homosocial alliance than ordinary men, because unlike them, he was deficient in terms of physical sturdiness on which the masculine will was tested, and because a kind of feminine aura pervaded around him. Emerson told an Englishman that “talking with [Hawthorne] was like talking to a girl” (Mellow 445), and Margaret Fuller mistook the author of “The Gentle Boy” to be a woman. Even Longfellow, who “was often described by his contemporaries as a kind of literary cross-dresser” “[1]ike Hawthorne, with whom he shared a long and mutually supportive fellowship” (Gruesz 47), made the following noteworthy remarks about him: “to converse with Hawthorne was like talking with a woman” (Elbert 19). Holmes, the professor of the medical department of Harvard University (thus reminds us of Chillingworth) went so far as to say, “talking to Hawthorne was like ‘love-making’: Hawthorne’s ‘shy, beauti-
ful, soul had to be wooed from its bashful pudency like an unschooled maiden” (Mellow 28).

Adler, the psychoanalyst, says this: “the body that one has once regarded as inferior in comparison to others’ is likely to keep its memory, even after the inferiority complex has been resolved, as the screen, on which dramas portraying how one’s strength, capacity, and anxiety, are projected” (Connel 139). Application of his remarks to Hawthorne alerts us to his anxiety and obsession about his own physical masculinity. Although he had already started his marital life by the time he published *The Scarlet Letter*, he was still diffident and uneasy about his qualification as a patriarch in his own family, and obsessed with his physique, masculinity, and male gender. In the mid nineteenth century, when gender politics operated to establish separate spheres—men outside home and women inside home—he was fired from the customs house before publishing *The Scarlet Letter*, and shedding this position of power, though the position was only the smallest unit within the administrative organization. Indeed, all the customs officers working with him were caricatured, deformed, and ill qualified for the masculine position of power. For example, one was endowed with “the rare perfection of his animal nature, the moderate proportion of intellect, the very trifling admixture of moral and spiritual ingredients; these latter qualities, indeed, being in barely enough measure to keep the old gentleman from walking on all-fours” (17). These portrayals, however, neither retracted the fact of Hawthorne’s dismissal nor abated his distress; undeniably, his socially defined masculine gender as a breadwinner was still forfeit; he was still disqualified as a patriarch in the public and private realms, and that is why he must have been all the more sensitive to his trauma, i.e., his repressed anxiety and dread about his physical masculinity. It does not matter at all that he was already forty six, because trauma is, according to Caruth, likely to spring up repeatedly in the form of flashbacks and nightmares, and the cause of the trauma is belatedly driven home. The critical moment of his dismissal triggered the hysteria and let flow the repressed unresolved anxiety about how he would appear to others in terms of gender. He was ousted from the world of the Lacan’s
Symbolic, the Language, the Logos; transferred to the ex-logic; excluded from the male-dominated community [excommunicated] to the epistemological frontier [the queer area]; (writer though he was,) robbed of the right as an authorized speaking subject and as a government employee; degraded into a subjugated being, similar to the subaltern; and thus placed in the shoes of Chillingworth of The Scarlet Letter, or the shoes of a woman of a middle-class patriarchic family.

The above-mentioned procedure cut Hawthorne to the *quick*, trapped him in the gender and body of Chillingworth, and as shown in the introduction of this paper, it must have prodded him to more quickly appropriate the female writer’s writing mode (despite his derogatory “d-d scribblers” comment directed against them); not the mere sentimental mode but “l’écriture feminine” as “writing the body”—what the two French feminists, Cixous and Irigaray have discussed. “L’écriture feminine,” “not necessarily writing by woman,” “is a practice of writing ‘in the feminine’ which undermines the . . . convention [gender-construction included] of Western narrative” (Showalter 9).

**Conclusion. Gender no more**

Chillingworth and Hawthorne share common factors, despite the striking difference between the two—the one ugly, and the other noted for having clear-cut features and feminine beauty. Hawthorne’s “remarkable sensuality—the beautifully rounded throat and chin, full lips, and broad, smooth expanse of naked shoulders and chest”—is attested to by the marble bust carved by a young sculptress, Louisa Lander (Herber 231); incidentally, the excessive sensuality in the bust and Lander’s assertive freedom ended the association between them.

Chillingworth is and is not a patriarchal figure. He is regarded as such, because in the public realm he earns respect from the people and in the domestic realm he vicariously plays the role of the inner God to the minister’s psyche; but he is not a patriarchal figure, because he conceals his real identity as Hester’s husband, turns into a phallic (m)other, and behaves in a queer way toward Dimmesdale. Like Chillingworth, albeit in a slightly different way, Hawthorne was and was not a patriarchal
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figure. He was not an authoritative figure, because in the public world he lost his masculinity in a symbolic beheading, which in the domestic sphere unsettled his patriarchic qualification as a breadwinner. On the other hand, he was an authoritative figure to some extent, because discursively he was resilient enough to be a speaking subject as the author of the story.

Chillingworth and Hawthorne are both torn between hiding anarchic sensuality and advocating socially viable domesticity, and both are gender-wise ambiguous, deviant from the dominant mode of masculinity. However, Hawthorne is so cautious as to say, “we may prate of the circumstances that lie around us, and even of ourselves, but still keep the inmost Me behind its veil,” adding at the same time that “an author, methinks, may be autobiographical” (4) (my italics). He is so obsessed with and driven to Chillingworth that he almost brings the old physician to the brink of queer existence, textually makes him the spectacle of a freak show, and portrays his queerness out and out. The author, endowed with a queer physique and emitting queer spiritual aura in a way slightly different from Chillingworth, recognizes the impossibility and futility of maintaining the prerogative masculine position or physicality-sublimating speaking subject, receives from Chillingworth what is in tune with himself, and spontaneously undertakes the load of the de-gendered subaltern.
Fig. 1 *The Original Sin* (ca. 1470). Hugo van der Goes. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Morokawa 12). The snake has a woman’s head.

Fig. 2 The statues made in the Middle Ages. Their motif is said to be homosexual love between Christ and St. John (Tatsumi 45). Perhaps the (anti-)Christ-like Chillingworth and Rev. Dimmesdale are homosexuality related.

Fig. 3 *The Bathing Bathsheba* (15C). Hans Memling. Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart (Morokawa 45). David sees Bathsheba bathing. He is smitten with lust for her.
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Notes

1 All subsequent references to this romance will be parenthetically included in this thesis. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. William Charvat et al., vol. 1 of *Centenary Edition* (1850; Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1962).

2 In her article “Are boys the Weaker Sex?” Mulrine says as follows: “When boys get emotional, parents and other adults often encourage them to tone it down” (44); “the only emotion that it’s OK for boys to have” is “anger”; “[m]aby that’s why we have so many angry boys . . .” (46).

3 Franzosa concludes that Hester is a “man-like or phallic mother, a fantasy which dominates this romance” (59).

4 Chillingworth, a practitioner of herbal medicine, is easily connected with necromancers and witches, and actually rumored to have been “in company the Doctor Forman, the famous conjurer” (127). Parsons and Ramsey indicate that the herb burdock Chillingworth collects represents the “freedom of a broken law” (205).

5 Incidentally, another example of gender transformation is Dracula, “a creature of the dark, of madness, and of ancient superstitution,” associated with “Other,” the female. S/He is “Transylvanian not English: aristocratic, not bourgeois; Un-Dead, not living” (Williams 122-23). According to Williams (124), Dracula’s uncanny power is in the disguise of the female by the male; the blood and the tooth associated with Dracula symbolize the terrible vagina and the menstrual blood. Interestingly, Chillingworth is sometimes called a “leech.”

Works Cited


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Engendering Empathy for the De-gendered: Hawthorne in The Scarlet Letter

SASAKI, Eitetsu

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64) draws the impetus to unfold The Scarlet Letter (1850) from the anger of Chillingworth, the old physician, whose wife Hester is stolen by the respectable minister Dimmesdale, and thus loses the prerogative position of patriarchy and patriarchal masculine gender. If we analyze this phenomenon in accordance with the theory of Kristeva, the Lacanian psychoanalyst and feminist, it follows that if deprived of masculinity, the repressed corporeality of Chillingworth comes to the fore and replaces the de-corporealised male body that monopolizes Logos (the world in Lacanian psychoanalysis). The corporeality that resurges is abject and closely related to the realm of woman, especially that of mother. If Chillingworth’s exposed corporeality was good to see, he could be saved. Analogized to “a dark flabby leaf,” and to “a barren and blasted spot” [that could produce only] “vegetable wickedness,” the ugliness of his body is overemphasized with exhaustion of life, sterility, and impotence. With his monstrosity and freakishness distinguished, he transforms himself into a mass of flesh or a mere unsightly matter; not a productive mother, but a terrifying phallic (m)other / monster; in other words, a (n) (m)other / other, the being other from the patriarchic community, or, the subaltern. If we refer to the findings of anthropologists and mythologists showing that the patriarch was established only after the conquest of mother goddess / monster, we understand that Chillingworth, who represents patriarchic Puritan society with his apparent pious attitude and who misuses its dogma, ironically becomes an object to be surmounted and driven from society by a patriarchic hero. If one sees that Chillingworth is compared

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to a “snake,” another word for a monster, one understands that the feature of mother goddess/monster is not attributed solely to Hester, the resilient virago expressive of her self will.

It is natural that the abject phallic mother should be generous to homosexual love since s/he reigns over the primitive pre-Oedipal area, or what Kristeva calls the semiotic where mother and child are umbilically related, and where the binary gender is still uncertain. The physician-turned-phallic-mother instills into the minister love mixed with resentment and becomes homosexual, which makes it difficult for him to retain his initial aim of retrieving the patriarchal position, and of reconfirming the male gender, because the premise of the patriarch depends on the compulsory heterosexual norm that ought to have enabled him to have his children and family.

Unlike Hester, bearing a showy embroidered letter A on the breast of her gown, the identity of Chillingworth as homosexual is difficult to distinguish as such. Indeed the homosexual is forcefully categorized into the group of subalterns—the group of subalterns composed of women, non-whites, and the like. Unlike them, however, the homosexual is neither a visible being nor a necessary evil that might be helpful to the self-styled heterosexual men in establishing their identity. Rather it can be safely said that he is all the more subversive to the patriarchy and therefore fated to be on the brink of banishment from the society based on compulsory heterosexuality. Chillingworth appears to represent patriarchic Puritanism, but he has to be content with his critical position as an invisible queer in the patriarchal society.

In the mid-nineteenth-century America, the imperialistic masculinity, the resilient will, and the physique robust and aggressive enough to acquire the western lands were admired and requisite under the movement of Manifest Destiny. In this context, in the present terminology, what was the reaction of the author, a man noted for his feminine beauty and aura, a suspicious queer? At the critical moment of his dismissal from the customs office, he must have felt excluded from society and transformed into the being other from the society, the subaltern. Still worse, his gender anxiety rooted deep in his own physicality must have

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surged up again, making it difficult for him to assume a pitiless stance toward Chillingworth, the queer subaltern. Hawthorne must have felt that, despite the difference of appearances, he himself possessed stuff in tune with Chillingworth. Realizing the impossibility and futility of maintaining the prerogative masculine position or the physicality-sublimating role as speaking subject, he must have spontaneously undertaken the load of de-gendered subaltern.