

Sexual Slavery and the Hope for the Future in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

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By

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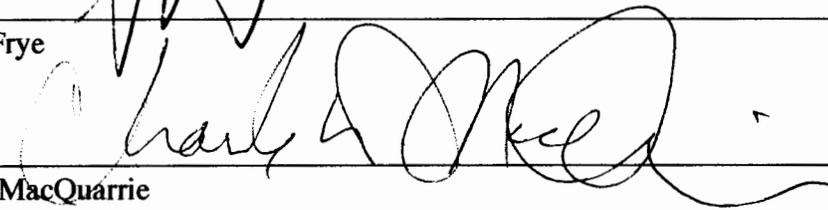
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## Introduction: Sexual Slavery and the Hope for the Future

The year is 1642. In a small Puritan village near Boston, a young, beautiful woman is forced upon a scaffold. Upon the bosom of her dress is emblazoned a scarlet letter “A.” All the locals are present, most of them to taunt and jeer at the spectacle before them. This married woman has given birth to a child, but the father is not her husband. Today is the day of her punishment, of her public humiliation and shame. This woman has been made a scapegoat by her society. She has been enslaved by her own people, who have transformed her into a symbol for their collective guilt and sin.

A man rises to speak. He is a minister adored and revered by all the people. They do not know his secret. They do not know that their symbol of purity has enslaved himself through his own secret guilt and shame. He is the father. In the audience is a man nobody has seen in quite some time, and nobody remembers anymore. He gazes upon the scene with a forced look of calm. Inside he has already died. Inside he has allowed himself to be transformed into the Devil by the fallen woman before his eyes. He is the husband. In the woman’s arms is a baby girl—the “demon-child” conceived in sin. Little does her mother know that this curse is to become her greatest blessing, and that, in her arms, lays the hope for a better future.

These four individuals are, of course, the four principle characters of Nathaniel’s Hawthorne’s romance *The Scarlet Letter*. In the one hundred and sixty-two years since the novel was first published, a rich critical history has developed. Such criticism has focused on such things as romance, symbolism, politics, religion, psychology, and gender and sex roles. This essay focuses upon the latter. More specifically, it derives its argument from the critical history of *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of gender and feminist criticism. The novel has been read in

various different ways over the years when it comes to what it has to say about gender, sexuality, and the roles of both men and women.

During the second feminist movement, many feminist and gender studies critics singled out the novel as a shining example of proto-feminist literature in nineteenth-century America. Nina Baym, almost indisputably the key figure in this movement, argues that Hawthorne's women reveal character flaws within the men that are patriarchal in nature and lead to their downfall, simultaneously asserting women's value. Based on her interpretation of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne's male characters cannot be whole and healthy until they recognize women as part of the universal "self" of man, rather than as a strange and exotic "other." (Baym, 257)

Since the 1980s, however, this argument has been challenged, with many scholars presenting evidence indicating that the novel may actually be an anti-feminist piece of conservative propaganda. One such critic, David Leverenz, argues that *The Scarlet Letter* fails as a work of proto-feminism because it punishes Hester. Her tie to Salem, and her decision not to leave, paints her as a victim rather than a heroine. According to Leverenz, "What starts as a feminist revolt against punitive patriarchal authority ends in a muddle of sympathetic pity for ambiguous victims." (Leverenz, 553) Here is referring to the ultimate "defeat" of Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth at the end of the novel, which he believes sabotages the "revolting" that takes place earlier.

This thesis incorporates, and attempts to reconcile, both sides of this debate. In doing so, it seeks to accomplish two purposes. First, it explores the possibility that *The Scarlet Letter* is a novel about sexual slavery for *both* men and women—on both a societal and personal level—as reflected in Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth. Second, it analyzes

Pearl as the only “free” character of Hawthorne’s story, and how she models Hawthorne’s vision for the future between the sexes.

Hester is enslaved through public condemnation, as symbolized by the scarlet letter she is forced to wear. Dimmesdale is enslaved through his own guilt and shame, as symbolized by “a SCARLET LETTER [sic]—the very semblance of that worn by Hester Prynne—imprinted in the flesh,” (Hawthorne, 162) as well as at the hands of both Hester and Roger Chillingworth. He is enslaved to Hester in the sense that he derives his energy and courage from her, and he is enslaved to Chillingworth through how that man tends to his needs when he falls ill due to his own guilt and shame. This may be viewed as an emasculation of Dimmesdale according to traditional American perceptions of masculinity. Chillingworth is enslaved by Hester’s sexuality, which transforms him into a “demon” (112), seeking only revenge upon Dimmesdale, and grief for Hester, the woman he once loved. Conversely, this enslavement, in turn, makes him into the enslaver and emasculator of Dimmesdale, who has ““violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart.”” (125-26)

While the novel depicts both sexes as enslaved, the enslavement originated with men, who cannot get past the guilt associated with their sexual compulsions, which “fly in the face of” American masculine ideals of autonomy and control, and have thus created the “angel-whore dichotomy” in women to serve as a scapegoat for their own sexual shame.

The “angel-whore dichotomy” will be explored from the perspective of the following definition: The angel is virtuous and in control of her own body, while the whore is out of control and must be “tamed” through “punishment.” In his essay “Pornographic Manhood and *The Scarlet Letter*,” Walter T. Herbert defines the “angel-whore dichotomy” as the following:

. . . the ‘angel’ sustains the man as he wishes to imagine himself, his existence—including his sexuality—blissfully under control. The ‘whore’ embodies the man confounded by the volcano in his heart. Imposing this paradox on women has the advantage (for men) of concealing its source in the core dilemmas of self-reliant masculinity. (Herbert, 116)

This suggests a reversal of traditional sexual roles in Western society that Herbert calls “pornographic manhood”. According to Herbert, nineteenth century American literature depicted pornographic manhood as a lustful force that conquers and enslaves a man, and ultimately destroys him. This was played out through the fantasy-drama of pornographic literature in 1850s America. It is one in which a man rapes a woman, but the woman adopts the masculine role in that she embodies the reality of his own sexuality. Specifically, the female represents the loss of control and ultimate erotic surrender that the male realizes is true to his own sexuality, but that he does not wish to face because it goes against his American masculine ideals of autonomy and control. Turning the masculine feminine can be seen through Chillingworth’s abuse of Dimmesdale, which mirrors the pornographic rape fantasy, in an emotional sense, by emasculating Dimmesdale and turning him into a feminine victim. Turning the female masculine, Herbert argues, is conveyed through Hester’s scarlet letter, which marks her as a fallen woman who lusts for sexual pleasure like a man.

Finally, this thesis will explore Hawthorne’s vision for the future of the sexes, as presented in *The Scarlet Letter*, through a formal analysis of Pearl, the “sin-child”—the offspring of “forbidden love.” While the other three principle characters of the story are essentially enslaved, it is Pearl alone who is truly free. In examining the sources of Pearl’s freedom, she will be revealed as the redemptive savior of both women (as represented by Hester) and men (as

represented by Dimmesdale). Finally, by the novel's end, there is strong evidence to support the idea that Pearl is, in fact, the future prophetess Hester speaks of, who will reveal a whole new system of male-female relations "in order to establish the whole ground between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness." (Hawthorne, 166) If Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth present us with the problem, it is through Pearl that Hawthorne presents to us his model—his solution.

## Chapter 1: The Scarlet Scapegoat: Hester as Slave, Enslaver, and Free Rebel

Hester stands upon the scaffold, enduring the condemnation of her entire society—her world entire. The scarlet letter burns her chest like fire. It is a painful fire of punishment, but also a purging fire of freedom. Unlike most others in her society, her sin is known by all, so she has nothing left to hide. In being made the “sacrifice” for the sins of others, she has become something of a female “Christ.” She is victimized and punished, but also a martyred heroine.

*The Scarlet Letter* opens upon the day of Hester’s public condemnation. She is lead from the prison and onto the scaffold so all the public can see her sin and the religious leaders can use her as a cautionary example—a warning. In being made an example, she becomes the town’s symbol for the evils of sin. She is her society’s scapegoat.

### Slave Upon the Scaffold: Social Scapegoating

In this opening on the scaffold, Hawthorne exposes us to how various groups within her community either punish Hester, or use her as a scapegoat for their own guilt and shame over their own sins. On the broadest level, the whole town has come out to witness Hester’s punishment; however, this punishment serves to quell their own inner “lusts,” as her punishment is eroticized into a form of rape. Herbert refers to this as “pornographic excitement” when he notes the following:

Hester attempts to resist the communal attack, but her gestures of defiance are taken as a provocation, and have the effect of magnifying the gratification that the spectacle provides to those who have gathered to view her punishment. The book opens, that is, with a scene of pornographic excitement, at the end of which

Hester is led back to prison virtually hysterical with agony. (Herbert, 117)

In other words, Hester's resistance pleases the crowd further. They are, in a sense, "getting off" on her emotional resistance being ignored and violated, turning her punishment into a form of communal emotional rape, while simultaneously providing the community with an outlet to express their baser sexual impulses on a psychological level.

It is not just the men who receive such gratification from emotionally raping Hester, but the women as well. One woman calls Hester a "hussy," (Hawthorne, 38) and many of them believe a far more painful punishment would have best suited her. One woman even goes so far as to suggest that they should have "put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead. Madam Hester would have winced at that, I warrant me." (39) The idea that Hawthorne is speaking of sexual enslavement for both sexes is encouraged here by showing how *both* genders are perversely excited by Hester's punishment. As Herbert points out, "This emotional rape is gendered male-on-female even when those who seek pleasure from it are female. Around the foot of the scaffold, Hawthorne tells us, stand 'man-like' women who insist that Hester should suffer a more gratifying penalty." (Herbert, 117) Hawthorne himself suggests the imagery of rape when one of the women wishes that the religious leaders had "stripped Madam Hester's rich gown off her dainty little shoulders." (Hawthorne, 41) Here we see one of the women taking pleasure in the idea of stripping Hester of her clothing against her will, which certainly presents an "attitude of rape."

Present at this public display is Arthur Dimmesdale, the most respected minister in the town, and the father of Hester's child. Like the rest in the town, he too is using Hester as a scapegoat for his own sexuality, though he derives no pleasure or satisfaction. He has even been asked to give a sermon to the people, using Hester as a cautionary example. He asks Hester to

reveal who the father is, but she refuses. He rebuttals this by saying that it would be better for him to be exposed because her open punishment is better. As Dimmesdale puts it, “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 deniest 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!” (Hawthorne, 49) While Dimmesdale does seem to want Hester to reveal him, he simultaneously seems eager to appease his own conscience by showing Hester how he suffers more than her. According to Dimmesdale, Hester’s scapegoating upon the scaffold allows her to work out an “open triumph,” even going so far as to try to convince Hester that her public shame makes her strong. According to this rationale, Dimmesdale suggests it is a good thing that Hester be used as a scapegoat. When Hester refuses to speak, Dimmesdale calls it the “wondrous strength and generosity of a woman’s heart!” (50) In referring to Hester’s insistence on keeping her public shame limited to herself as being positive aspects of a woman’s heart, he suggests that a woman with a good heart is one willing to be made into a scapegoat.

Finally, Hester’s husband, Roger Chillingworth, is also at the event. Like Dimmesdale, he too allows Hester to be used as a scapegoat, though, unlike Dimmesdale, he seems to share in the town’s excitement over her punishment, and seems to enjoy the fact that only she knows who he is. When Hester sees Chillingworth in the crowd, and he realizes that she recognizes him, he “slowly and calmly raised his finger, made a gesture with it in the air, and laid it to his lips.” (45) This action can be interpreted two ways. He may have been asking Hester not to reveal who he is, thus saving himself from much of the same embarrassment Hester is experiencing. However, he may have also been letting Hester know that he will not reveal himself. As to Chillingworth’s reasons for this, much is revealed in his private conversation with Hester, which takes place in

her prison cell after the public humiliation upon the scaffold is over. Here he blames only himself for Hester's infidelity. Despite his belief that the fault is entirely his own, he still allows Hester to be the only one who is punished. He is more than willing to allow her to publicly suffer, but not himself. He blames her infidelity on his own unattractiveness, calling himself "a man already in decay . . . what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own!" (Hawthorne, 53) This belittling of his own self effectively ensures that Hester will not reveal who he is. He does this by making himself seem pitiable, thus evoking her sympathies. In belittling himself, Chillingworth may also be trying to cause Hester further guilty feelings, channeled specifically towards him, making her feel even more ashamed for her actions, and turning him into the victim, so that she will allow herself to be seen as the sole perpetrator. Chillingworth's tactics prove very effective in controlling Hester, as she, in turn, promises not to reveal who he is to anyone.

To both Hester and the others, Pearl further punishes, enslaves, and scapegoats her. In Pearl, she sees "the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life." (42) She also views Pearl as a personification of the scarlet letter, the symbol of her public proclamation of sin. This is described in the following excerpt:

. . . Hester Prynne . . . stood on the scaffold of the pillory, an infant on her arm, and the letter A [sic], in scarlet, fantastically embroidered with gold thread, upon her bosom! She clutched the child so fiercely to her breast, that it sent forth a cry; she turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, and even touched it with her finger, to assure herself that the infant and the shame were real. Yes! [sic]—these were her realities—all else had vanished! (44)

Hester continues to feel shame before the people over both her letter and the child. To her, they

are both symbols of the guilt and shame she has been forced to endure.

### The Willing Slave and Social Scapegoat: Personal Enslavement

This condemnation from all those in her world leads Hester to also condemn herself. She becomes a willing scapegoat, and acquiesces to the punishment she has been forced to endure for the rest of her life. According to Leverenz, Hawthorne writes Hester this way because, “He seems fully aware that his readers will accept Hester only while she suffers for her sin . . . making his heroine satisfactorily miserable.” (Leverenz, 574) When she touches the letter and looks at the child, she feels great pain over committing adultery. She turns down Chillingworth’s attempt to have her letter removed, saying, “Were I worthy to be quit of it, it would fall away of its own nature, or be transformed into something that should speak a different purport.” (Hawthorne, 110) Hester views the letter as indicative of who she is and what she stands for. If she were not worthy of being labeled by society for her sexual sin, the letter would no longer hold power over her, or its power would be transformed to more accurately present who she really is to her society.

### The Symbol of Enslavement

This, of course, raises questions as to the exact function of the scarlet letter as a means of scapegoating and enslaving Hester. It is clearly a symbol, but for what? Initially, it is the symbol for “adultery” and is meant to indicate her sin to the people, making her the symbol for all of their sexual sin. Women, men, poor, rich, literally just about *everybody* in the town, looks at her as the personification of sin, and yet Hester is willing to suffer for it and be the scapegoat, even going so far as to “pray for her enemies.” (59) Indeed, both Hester, as well as the

townspeople, endow this letter with a sense of supernatural power, which Hawthorne symbolically emphasizes when Hester sees the letter in a distorted mirror. It is “in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed absolutely hidden behind it.” (Hawthorne, 72) Here Hawthorne symbolizes what the letter has become to Hester, as well as the people of the town. It has become her most prominent feature. It is what the people see in her, and it is what she sees of herself. Hester as an actual person has become hidden behind this symbol placed upon her by her community. Hawthorne continues with this idea to suggest that the letter deprives Hester of her womanhood. In the forest, when Hester and Dimmesdale have agreed to leave the town and start a new life together, she removes the letter, to the following effect:

The stigma gone, Hester heaved a long, deep sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit . . . By another impulse, she took off the formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders . . . imparting the charm of softness to her features. There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood . . . Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back. (130)

When she calls Pearl to return to her, she refuses to come until Hester reattaches the letter. She apprehensively obliges. In doing so “her beauty, the warmth and richness of her womanhood, departed, like fading sunshine, and a gray shadow seemed to fall across her.” (135) Hawthorne describes to us the symbolic power that the letter has had over Hester, robbing her of her very womanhood—of her happiness, tenderness, and youthful vitality. The letter has been “keeping her down”—making her a slave to the people and a slave to herself.

Hawthorne even goes so far as to suggest that this symbol literally allows Hester to see the sins of others. At times, she would sense that “the scarlet letter had endowed her with a new sense . . . a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts.” (Hawthorne, 60) This leads her to ask if “the outward guise of purity was but a lie, and that, if truth were everywhere to be shown, a scarlet letter would blaze forth on many a bosom besides Hester Prynne’s?” (60) Hawthorne never makes it clear whether or not Hester truly has been granted this extra-sensory ability, but it further enforces the idea that Hester’s letter is but a symbol for the sins of many, many others, and that, in making her the sole wearer, she has become a scapegoat for the sexual sins that exist within the hearts of so many others within her community.

#### The Dark Seductress: Hester as Sorceress and Enslaver

Although Hawthorne depicts Hester as an enslaved scapegoat, she is not only painted as a victim, but also as a perpetrator. He often suggests that Hester’s sexuality is a dark and destructive thing that casts a “spell” over men. This spell is likened to witchcraft on numerous occasions. David S. Reynolds addresses this idea in his book *Beneath the American Renaissance*. Chapter seven, “The Erotic Imagination”, examines the way sexuality was handled in the time leading up to Hawthorne’s first publishing of *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850 in both the popular and pornographic fictions. In these works, the angel-whore dichotomy was enacted when a “‘stainless girl’ becomes ‘a polluted thing.’” (Herbert, 115) Reynolds examines how many of these works went out of their way to express that “‘women of all kinds, even ‘the most holy and consecrate,’ privately express the most licentious fantasies.” (Reynolds, 213) He likens the depiction of women in these works to “an insatiable sexual vampire who demanded constant sexual stimulation but drained vital force from man every time he experienced orgasm.”

(Reynolds, 217) While there was no belief in vampires in the New England colonies in the 1640s, the belief in dark supernatural beings living among us was alive and well in the form of witches (the story takes place outside Salem, in a time very shortly before the Salem Witch Trials were to take place), so it is no wonder that Hester's sexuality seems to hold so much power over the men in her town, most of whom would have believed a fallen sexual woman like her to be some kind of witch with magic powers.

Indeed, Hester's sexuality is suggested to be some form of magical witchcraft at numerous points throughout *The Scarlet Letter*. The scarlet letter, a symbol of Hester's sexuality, seems to itself have "had the effect of a spell" (Hawthorne, 41) over the people who see it for the first time when Hester is forced upon the scaffold. Later in the story, Hawthorne further connects the letter to witchcraft. Pearl tells Hester of a story Mistress Hibbins just told her. In the novel, it is strongly implied that Hibbins is, in fact, an actual witch, who regularly steals out into the forest in the middle of the night to meet the Black Man. This calls to mind Goodman Brown's encounter in the forest in Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown", published in 1835. Goodman Brown steals out into the forest in the middle of the night and encounters a man with a black, serpent-shaped staff. The encounter results in his possibly almost being initiated into a satanic group of witches. According to Pearl's recounting of Hibbins's story, the Black Man carries a heavy book, and anybody who meets him in the forest are to "write their names in their own blood," (120) then he "sets his mark on their bosoms!" (120) This imagery would seem to suggest the "mark of the beast" referred to in the Biblical book of Revelation, as well as a perversion of the Lord's "Book of Life," referenced many times throughout the Old and New Testaments. Pearl asks her mother if she ever met the man. Hester initially resists answering this question, but Pearl insists until she gives in. Hester answers her

by exclaiming, “Once in my life I met the Black Man! . . . This scarlet letter is his mark!”

(Hawthorne, 120) Here, Hester suggests that her scarlet letter is a mark of her fallen status—as one given over to the Devil. Hawthorne goes even further to suggest that Hester’s letter marks her as something of a witch when she encounters Hibbins near the end of the novel. Here she reveals to Hester that both of them “behold the token.” (153) In saying this, Hibbins asserts that both Hester and she bare the scarlet letter, but that hers is not worn openly. This suggests a connection between Hester and Hibbins, a witch, on a spiritual, symbolic level.

While not always viewed as supernatural, Hawthorne’s novel frequently returns to this idea that Hester’s “womanly” sexuality is a destructive force with the power to enslave, and ultimately destroy, men. This can be seen in how both Dimmesdale and Chillingworth react to Hester’s sexuality, both during the novel, and in response to Hester’s infidelity with Dimmesdale—and the resulting conception and birth of Pearl—which took place before the novel begins. Before the novel opens, Hester and Dimmesdale have already “done the deed”. Prior to this event, all the people viewed Dimmesdale as a man of strong moral character. While this perception persisted, Dimmesdale no longer saw it as true to himself, and by the opening to the novel he is described as “apprehensive, [with] a startled, a half-frightened look,—as [sic] of a being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss in the pathway of human existence.” (48)

Dimmesdale is noticeably “astray” and “at a loss”, seemingly as a result of his sex with Hester.

As the novel progresses, Dimmesdale gradually grows weaker in body, mind, and spirit. When Hester reveals to Dimmesdale that Chillingworth is her husband, it appears that Dimmesdale’s “manly strength” may be returning to him. He looks at her “for an instant, with all the violence of passion . . . Never was there a blacker or a fiercer frown than Hester now encountered.” (125) However, “his character had been so much enfeebled by suffering, that

even its lower energies were incapable of more than a temporary struggle. He sank down on the ground, and buried his face in his hands.” (Hawthorne, 125) It is at this point where Dimmesdale seems to lose all hope of regaining power and autonomy over himself. He becomes utterly despondent, and now Hester has to become the leader. He exclaims to her, “Think for me, Hester! Though art strong. Resolve for me! . . . Be thou strong for me! . . . Advise me what to do!” (126-27) Keep in mind that, not only was this novel published in 1850, but the story takes place in the 1640s. No self-respecting man would have lowered himself to give up his power and control to a woman. In doing so, Dimmesdale has shown himself to be completely emasculated. Dimmesdale has taken on the feminine sexual role, and Hester the masculine, illustrating Herbert’s concept of “pornographic manhood” in the American literature of the mid-nineteenth century. At this point, Hester accepts her masculine role, and convinces Dimmesdale to leave with Pearl and herself back to Europe, a scandalous decision for a woman to make for any man at that time, *especially* a clergyman. At this point, something changes inside of Dimmesdale. He becomes energized, yet, on his way out of the forest, after leaving Hester, he finds himself in a dark spiritual “maze” and is tempted to commit many sins he would never have even considered before, leading Dimmesdale to ponder if he did, in reality, “make a contract with him [the fiend] in the forest, and sign it with my blood?” (140) From Dimmesdale’s perspective, giving into the power of Hester has become perhaps the equivalent to making a contract with the Devil. His reference to a “contract in the forest” signed with his own blood also recalls the earlier scene in the novel in which Pearl talks about the Black Man in the forest, who asks people to sign his book with their own blood. Remember that Hester tells her that the scarlet letter is the Black Man’s mark, thus suggesting that she has already become something of a “witch” herself. Ultimately, Dimmesdale dies, but such a tragic death would

never have occurred had he not given into Hester's "womanhood" before the novel began.

Hester's womanly sexuality has lead him to his grave.

Of course, many may not interpret Dimmesdale's fate in this way. In fact, it would seem that Roger Chillingworth played a much greater role in Dimmesdale's destruction, but the novel undercuts this interpretation by suggesting that Hester is responsible for changing Chillingworth into the "fiend" that he is. Recall that, in Chillingworth's encounter with Hester at the prison, he blames her infidelity on himself. Blaming himself for his wife's unfaithfulness seems like an unusual move for a man in his society to make, especially when he acts insecure and blames it on his "unattractiveness", which many might read as a rather "feminine" reaction. It would seem that Hester's sexuality is emasculating Chillingworth, as well.

After this, Chillingworth begins caring for Dimmesdale through the practice of alchemy, and many of his methods are likened to magic and witchcraft, which, as was previously discussed, was usually associated with women. Even to the townspeople, Chillingworth's "scientific attainments were esteemed hardly less than supernatural." (Hawthorne, 81) Hester even sees Chillingworth physically altering into something dark and evil when she encounters him at the Governor's office. She is "startled to perceive what a change had come over his features,--how [sic] much uglier they were,--how [sic] his dark complexion seemed to have grown duskier, and his figure more misshapen." (76) Chillingworth continues to grow darker and more evil over the course of the novel, which seems to reach its climax when Hester confronts him in the forest. Chillingworth reminds Hester of the innocent man he used to be and asks her who "made me so?" (112) Hester replies, "It was myself!" (112) Hester has willingly admitted to enslaving Chillingworth to darkness through her sexual decision with Dimmesdale.

At the end of the novel, after Dimmesdale's death, Chillingworth himself becomes weak

and frail. He had committed his whole life to the “pursuit and systematic exercise of revenge,” (Hawthorne, 164) so the minister’s death left him with “no more Devil’s work on earth for him to do.” (164) Ultimately, Chillingworth “withered up, shriveled away, and almost vanished from mortal sight.” (164) He dies shortly thereafter. Chillingworth’s transformation, which Hester acknowledges as her fault, leads not only to Dimmesdale’s death, but also to his own, suggesting that both men have been destroyed by Hester’s sexuality.

### Freedom and Rebellion

While Hester’s sexual “liberty” does seem to lead to enslavement for the male characters, it conversely brings a certain level of freedom to herself. The novel, at several points, suggests that Hester’s “open shame” has, in a sense, freed her from the same moral laws that the rest of her community must hold to. This can be seen when she meets Dimmesdale in the forest. Her perspective on personal morality is no longer that of the community, even suggesting that the sex that she engaged in with Dimmesdale “had a consecration of its own,” (126) thus implicating that it was deemed as holy by God, by standards outside of community law. Her belief in this is taken further in the moments before Dimmesdale’s death. Hester asks the minister, “Shall we not meet again? . . . Shall we not spend our immortal life together? Surely, surely, we have ransomed one another, with all this woe!” (162) Not only did their actions have a “consecration of their own”, but their suffering for it has moved outside of traditional judgments and will allow them to be united together, as husband and wife, for all eternity in heaven.

Hawthorne explains why Hester is able to think outside of community law in the following passage:

But Hester Prynne . . . for so long a period not merely estranged, but outlawed

from society, had habituated herself to such a latitude of speculation . . . She had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness . . . Her intellect and her heart had their home . . . 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 whatever priests or legislators had established; criticising [sic] 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. (Hawthorne, 128)

Because Hester has become an outcast from her community, she no longer truly shares in it. She is left isolated and alone, without any community's rules to guide her. Due to this, her mind is able to contemplate things without having to pass through the filters of communal norms and moral expectations. She has, in essence, become as free as the Native-Americans (who the novel depicts as free and "lawless;" an unfortunate stereotype, but typical of Hawthorne's day). The scarlet letter is the symbol of her banishment from society, so it is the letter itself that has, in a sense, set her mind free.

This freedom also transforms Hester into something of a rebel and revolutionary in her time. As Jesse F. Battan put it in the *Journal of Social History*:

Women who broke the rules and engaged in premarital or extramarital sex were shunned. Those women whose sexual reputations had been tarnished by the corrosive power of local gossip had few avenues of escape. They could give in, accept their shame, and bear the ostracism of the community. They could move

on in hopes of recreating a more 'respectable' sense of self. Or they could reject the community's judgment of their behavior. This last option was the most dangerous to the social order because it challenged the extralegal power of public opinion and social respect. (Battan, 610)

Interestingly, Hester does seem to reject her community's judgment on a personal level, but accepts her shame and ostracism on the community level. This limits the extent to which Hester can be viewed as a rebel or revolutionary (which would be more fully realized in her daughter, Pearl, as we shall see in chapter four), but there is still textual evidence to support this decidedly "feminist" reading of the story's protagonist. In the early years after her punishment, Hester does indeed seem willing to accept her role as a victimized societal scapegoat, but there are certain key moments in the story where we see her starting to transform into the "free" woman Hawthorne describes in chapter seventeen.

The first such moment takes place in chapter eight, "The Elf-Child and the Minister". Governor Bellingham intends to take Pearl away from Hester so that she does not have to live as a social outcast. Hester goes to his office to plead for Pearl's continued custody. Chillingworth and Dimmesdale are also present. When Hester's initial, meek plea fails to yield results, she boldly "shrieks" at Bellingham, crying, "I will not give her up!" (Hawthorne, 76) She then appeals directly to Dimmesdale, exclaiming, "Speak for me! . . . I will not lose the child! Look to it!" (76) While she is ultimately appealing to a man for help, the help is *demand*ed, which would have been viewed as a very brazen thing for a woman in her community to do. Dimmesdale, of course, acquiesces to her demand, and Hester is able to keep Pearl.

The next key moment in Hester's journey toward revolutionary occurs after Pearl and she stand with Dimmesdale upon the scaffold in the middle of the night. After seeing how weak he

has become at the hands of Chillingworth, Hester “vows to redeem Dimmesdale from his own weakness and his malevolent tormentor. She will accomplish ‘the rescue of the victim’ from her husband’s ‘power.’” (Leverenz, 568) Here we see Dimmesdale as the weak, feminine victim, and Hester as the masculine rescuer, another inversion of traditional sexual roles inherent in Herbert’s definition of “pornographic manhood”. This inversion is a turning point in the novel, and, from this point until nearly the end of the novel, Hester becomes the leader in her relationship with Dimmesdale. She is now “wearing the pants,” so to speak.

Hester’s leadership over Dimmesdale is seemingly “consummated” when she later meets Dimmesdale again, in the forest. As previously discussed, Dimmesdale tells Hester to think for him and make his decisions. She decides that they will both go back to Europe, with Pearl. This renews Dimmesdale with energy and life. While initially this life and energy seems to be “evil” in nature, it ultimately seems to provide him with the strength to finally confess at the end of the novel. Indeed, Dimmesdale calls Hester to join him upon the scaffold, asking her to “twine thy strength about me!” (Hawthorne, 160) Even in his “final revelation” Dimmesdale still needs Hester’s strength to support him.

Dimmesdale ultimately dies, without any true indication of having found any sense of freedom (at least not in his earthly life). This suggests that Hester, a woman, is ultimately stronger than Dimmesdale—not only a man, but also a respected religious leader. As Erika M. Kreger puts it in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, “Unlike the feeble Dimmesdale . . . Hester has the strength to leave the dark maze.” (Kreger, 331) Hester’s strength over her male counterpart would certainly have been considered quite “rebellious” in her, and even Hawthorne’s, time.

In chapter thirteen, “Another View of Hester”, Hester even goes so far as to imagine the task of “building the whole social system anew, changing sex roles so completely that both

womanhood and manhood will become unrecognizable to themselves.” (Leverenz, 558) Hester reflects on this idea in the following passage:

Indeed, some dark question often rose in her mind, with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? . . . 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 women can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. (Hawthorne, 108)

Indeed, this is certainly revolutionary thinking for Hester, and even anticipated the views of radical feminism that developed during the Second Women’s Movement of the 1960s-1970s. This feminist view is undercut, however, by Hawthorne’s own judgment of Hester’s reflection, stating that, “The scarlet letter had not done its office.” (109)

### The Prophecy

In the novel’s epilogue, Hester returns to her town several years later, without Pearl, and resumes her old life, socially ostracized, and still bearing the scarlet letter. Though the novel teases us with the idea that Hester may become some sort of revolutionary, that is not what takes place. She agrees to remain her society’s scapegoat until the day she dies. She has been sexually enslaved, but she also becomes a beacon of hope for the other women in her town. She counsels women in states of “wounded, wasted, wronged, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion,” (165) who demand to know “why they were so wretched, and what the remedy!” (165) It is here that Hester is transformed into a prophetess, predicting that “at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven’s own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to

establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness.” (Hawthorne, 166) Here we see Hester’s reflections in chapter thirteen being communicated to the women in her town as a “fact.” She is now *sure* that this change in society will take place in the future. She becomes a harbinger, not of immediate change, but of hope, “invigorating other despondent women with the hope of some future prophetess.” (Leverenz, 564) She predicts that this truth will be revealed by a prophetess; however, “Earlier in life, Hester had vainly imagined that she herself might be the destined prophetess, but had long since recognized the impossibility that any mission of divine and mysterious truth should be confided to a woman stained with sin, bowed down with shame, or even burdened with a life-long sorrow.” (Hawthorne, 166) This presents us with a Hester that is still ultimately tied down by the conservative values of her community, tying femininity to humility, “knowing that she is too ‘bowed down with shame’ to be the prophetess of this coming era.” (Kreger, 334) While Hester does secure for herself a level of personal freedom, she fails to become the revolutionary the novel seems to earlier suggest.

### Conclusion

In analyzing *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of sexual slavery, it would seem that Hester reflects this theme on various levels. She has been made a symbol for sexual sin for all her community. She has become her society’s scapegoat for sexual sin. Hester accepts her scarlet letter, and even goes so far as to view her own daughter, Pearl, as its personification. In this way, Hester has been sexually enslaved by her community. At the same time, Hester is also depicted as being herself a sexual enslaver of men. Her sexuality is likened to witchcraft by suggesting that she has a connection with Miss Hibbins, a witch, as well as with the “Black Man in the forest”. Hester’s sexuality with Dimmesdale weakens him and drains him of masculine

autonomy and control, thereby emasculating him. Chillingworth, her husband, is transformed, like the feminine victim of the seduction novel, into “a polluted thing” (Herbert, 115) as a result of Hester’s sexual sin, and this “pollution” that grows within, enslaving him to the pursuit of revenge, ultimately sends him to an early grave. However, while her sexual “liberty” seems to destroy men, it ultimately appears to be freeing to herself, and provides hope for the women in her community. Her banishment from society frees her mind from traditional conceptions of morals as tied to community law, and this freedom ultimately makes her stronger than the men in her novel, especially Dimmesdale, her “partner in crime”, who derives his strength and energy from Hester, which ultimately gives him the courage to make his final confession. She does not, however, become a rebel or revolutionary, as the novel teases earlier. By the end of the novel, she is counseling the women in her town. She becomes a prophetess, predicting that a female revolutionary will come and positively change the way men and women relate to one another.

Hester never completely frees herself from her sexual slavery; however, unlike the men in the story, she is strong enough not to allow her slavery to lead to her destruction. The reasons why the men cannot find this strength will be the primary subject of the following chapter.

## Chapter 2: The Emasculated Minister: Dimmesdale's Seduction, Rape, and Feminization

Dimmesdale stands upon the scaffold, in the very place where Hester stood. However, there is no crowd gathered to revel at the punishment for his sin. Nobody sees a scarlet letter embroidered on his clothes. Little do they know that this minister suffers far more than their scarlet scapegoat ever will. While Hester suffers openly, for everybody to see, Dimmesdale cannot make his suffering known. Indeed, there is only one person in his entire world that knows of his secret shame, and she is exactly the one he must avoid. It is they who both bare the scarlet letter, but the minister's is unknown. He clutches his heart. The pain of his own letter bears upon him every day and tortures him with guilt. His "telltale chest" urges him to make his sins known, but he lacks the scapegoat's "manly strength."

While Hester manages to find some semblance of personal freedom during the course of *The Scarlet Letter*, and becomes a positive force for the women in her community, Dimmesdale's sexual enslavement overwhelms and destroys him. While Hester is depicted with a certain level of "manly strength", especially in her later interactions with Dimmesdale, Dimmesdale is entirely devoid of such strength and must rely upon others to sustain him. This works against the western ideals of masculine strength, and feminizes Dimmesdale, expressing the inversion of gender roles and sexual characteristics at the core of Herbert's conception of pornographic manhood. As Herbert himself notes, "Competitive self-reliance became a masculine ideal in the early nineteenth century," (Herbert, 115) and, by the novel's end, Dimmesdale seems entirely codependent. This enslavement and emasculation can be seen in Dimmesdale's relationships with Hester, Chillingworth, himself, and his community.

### The Feminine Victim: Dimmesdale's Pornographic Manhood

According to Herbert's definition of "pornographic manhood" in nineteenth century American literature, masculine sexuality was depicted as a lustful force that conquers and enslaves a man, and ultimately destroys him. In these stories, a man rapes a woman, but the woman adopts the masculine role in that she embodies the reality of his own sexuality. Specifically, the female represents the loss of control and ultimate erotic surrender that the male realizes is true to his own sexuality, but that he does not wish to face because it goes against his American masculine ideals of autonomy and control. Herbert's gender inversion in pornographic manhood is based upon the "fantasy-drama" popular in American literature of Hawthorne's time, which pictured "a self-possessed male aggressor and a woman falling victim to her own desire." (Herbert, 115) Pornographic manhood represents a reversal of this fantasy-drama, wherein "as the male aggressor consummates his triumph, he succumbs to the volcano of lust." (115) This suggests that it is, in actuality, the *male* who is "succumbing" and being victimized by his own inability to control the sexuality incited by the erotic woman he is "compelled" to seduce. Here we see the role of the woman as seducer and the man as the innocent victim.

Hawthorne sets up Dimmesdale as this "innocent victim" by introducing him in feminine terms. We are first introduced to Dimmesdale on the day of Hester's public humiliation upon the scaffold. Hawthorne provides the following description for the minister:

He was a person of very striking aspect, with a white, lofty, and impending brow, large, brown, melancholy eyes, and a mouth . . . apt to be tremulous, expressing both nervous sensibility, and a vast power of self-restraint . . . there was an air about this young minister,--an [sic] apprehensive, a startled, a half-frightened look

. . . Therefore . . . he . . . kept himself simple and childlike . . . with a freshness, and fragrance, and dewy purity of thought, which, as many people said, affected them like the speech of an angel. (Hawthorne, 48)

This description would have painted a very feminine portrait of Dimmesdale for Hawthorne's nineteenth-century American readers. In *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Erika M. Kreger notes that, during this time, "the male body implie[d] volume or density, the woman's airy ethereality." (Kreger, 319) Hawthorne does not describe Dimmesdale as one with "volume" or "density." Rather, he is described as having "large, melancholy eyes," implying an inherently emotional and sympathetic quality that would have been associated with a female. His mouth is described as "tremulous" and as "expressing sensibility and self-restraint." The popular conception of womanhood at this time included the qualities of quiet sensibility and humble self-restraint, whereas a man was seen as a pro-active, vocal, independent social advocate. Hawthorne also uses words such as "freshness" and fragrance," words one would have normally associated with the description of a "lady." Finally, Dimmesdale has a "dewy purity of thought." "Dewy" is certainly not a word one would associate with masculinity, even today, and his description of Dimmesdale as "pure" expresses what was expected of women in Hawthorne's time.

Would this same description have applied to Dimmesdale before the novel opens—before his adultery with Hester? While there is no way of knowing this for certain, the novel makes it very clear that his infidelity has left him "wracked with guilt", and that this weakens him to the point where he feels trapped, and he needs other people to empower him. He has lost his own autonomy and power of self-actualization. In succumbing to Hester's sexuality, he has succumbed to his own "volcano of lust" and has allowed himself to be effectively seduced by Hester. Her public condemnation turns her into the scapegoat for his own masculine sexual

shame, which “flies in the face” of his western masculine ideals of autonomy and control.

Over the course of the novel, Dimmesdale is described in increasingly feminine terms as the guilt over his own pornographic manhood further and further emasculates him. In the process, he becomes more and more like the “self-absorbed heroine whose exaggerated emotion leaves her vulnerable to a lustful man's manipulations.” (Kreger, 323) He is now a “vulnerable, emotional woman” who is dependent upon her man. Dimmesdale’s “man” comes from two sources, Hester and Chillingworth.

### Wearing the Dress

Dimmesdale as the “vulnerable woman,” and the model of pornographic manhood, who needs Hester as her “man,” can be seen in the very first exchange the novel gives us between them, which takes place publicly upon the scaffold. Here Dimmesdale urges Hester to confess who Pearl’s father is, knowing full well that it would reveal his secret sin. When she refuses, he counters with the following entreaty:

Be not silent from any mistaken pity or tenderness for him; for, believe me, Hester, though he were 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 . . . Take heed how thou deniest 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! (Hawthorne, 49)

While this entreaty implies that it is good for Hester to be a scapegoat (as discussed in the previous chapter), it serves two additional functions. First, it places Hester in the position of the man and Dimmesdale in the position of the woman. He tells Hester not to be silent, and that any

pity and tenderness she is trying to show toward him is mistaken. In antebellum America, it was considered good and proper for a woman to be silent, and to have a tender heart of pity. In asking Hester to be the opposite, he is putting her into the masculine position, while his continued silence puts him in the feminine position. Second, Dimmesdale is telling Hester that he lacks her courage to confess, and that he needs her strength in order to make the confession for him. He lacks the independent courage and strength necessary for him to do what he believes is right, and needs Hester to do it for him. In essence, Dimmesdale has relinquished his own, autonomous strength, and is relying on Hester to have enough “manly strength” and independent courage for the both of them.

Later, when Hester visits Governor Bellingham to plea that she be allowed to keep Pearl, we see Hester empowering and strengthening Dimmesdale. When she arrives there, she finds the minister “pale, and holding his hand over his heart.” When she more or less *demands* that Dimmesdale defend her right to keep Pearl, he suddenly finds the strength to speak up and boldly advocate on Hester’s behalf. He finally finds another moment of masculinity. Once he has succeeded, and Hester is no longer appealing to him, he again withdraws. Hester’s own “rebellious strength” seems to “infect” Dimmesdale, and he needs her to “infect” him, for that is where he finds his strength. He is utterly dependent upon her.

Dimmesdale’s pornographic emasculation, and the reversal of sexual roles between Hester and himself, reaches its full fruition during their meeting in the forest. Recall that Hester has already identified herself with the forest in telling Pearl that her letter is the “Black Man’s mark”, and that the forest motif is a holdover from Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown.” As in that story, the woods are endowed with a sense of dark magic and mystery. They are wild and untamed, and exist outside of the rules and laws created by society. When Dimmesdale first

meets Hester, she is emerging from out of the woods, much like when Goodman Brown encounters the man in the woods. When he takes Hester's hand, she leads him "back into the shadow of the woods." (Hawthorne, 123) Like Goodman Brown before him, Dimmesdale is being lead "astray," outside the world of rules and morals that he preaches in his community, and into the dark, untamed "heart of darkness." Once inside the forest, absolute despair befalls Arthur Dimmesdale. He becomes weak and speaks nothing but hopelessness over himself. Hester responds by preaching forgiveness to the minister, creating a complete reversal of their roles within their community. When Hester tells him that Chillingworth was her husband, his "manly strength" seems to return to him, and he looks at her with "violence of passion." (125) Interestingly, Hawthorne informs us that, in this look, is "the portion of him which the Devil claimed." (125) In the forest, with Hester, the "fallen woman", the Devil seeks to claim him. Ultimately, though, he has not the strength to maintain his "passion" and, "He sank down to the ground and buried his face in his hands." (125) It is at this point that Hester's "seduction" of Dimmesdale begins in earnest. She speaks against the very moral code he believes in, and tells him that their sex "had a consecration of its own." (126) While Dimmesdale, a Puritan minister, would certainly have been expected to rebuke such a notion, he simply acknowledges what she says. He then grows terrified of what will happen to him, and sees no way out. In a plea of emotional desperation, he cries to Hester, "Think for me, Hester! Thou art strong! Resolve for me!" (126) The role reversal is complete. Dimmesdale has relinquished all autonomy and control to Hester. He desperately needs her to sustain him. He is now the one "wearing the dress" and has become a true representative of pornographic manhood.

Hester readily accepts her role as the "man" in the relationship, and immediately advises him to leave his community and start a new life somewhere else. If Dimmesdale were to follow

through on this, it would scandalize his whole community, and he knows this, but he no longer accepts for himself any say in his fate. While he agrees it is the only way, he is afraid to venture forth alone. At this point Hester makes the crucial decision that she will go with him and give him strength. Hester is now in charge of Dimmesdale's fate, and she has easily convinced him to go against everything he believes in to start a new life with Pearl and her. Dimmesdale's seduction is complete.

Now effectively seduced, Dimmesdale is elated at the prospect of "running away with her 'man,'" and he proclaims, "Do I feel joy again? . . . Methought the germ of it was dead in me! O Hester, though art my better angel!" (Hawthorne, 129) According to many Jewish and Christian doctrines, angels are servants of the Most High God, and they serve functions as messengers, as well as that of guardians and protectors of God's children. In referring to Hester as an "angel," Dimmesdale suggests that Hester is his guardian and protector, which many would see as a major inversion of "proper" sexual roles in western society, even by contemporary standards.

At this point, Hester and Dimmesdale depart, and things seem to be looking up for the young minister. He seems to be revitalized with new life, and his meeting with Hester has "lent him unaccustomed physical energy, and hurried him townward [sic] at a rapid pace." (137) While readers in Hawthorne's time would likely have been appalled by his perceived total emasculation, readers today might consider this a positive turning point for Dimmesdale. However, Hawthorne makes sure we conclude quite the opposite in the chapter that follows this meeting in the woods, "The Minister in a Maze."

### The Minister in a Maze

At the beginning of this chapter, Dimmesdale recognizes that he has been changed into a

new man. He thinks to himself, “I am not the man for whom you take me! I left him yonder in the forest!” (Hawthorne, 138) This transformation initially seems like a godsend, but is very soon transformed into something dark and malevolent. Here Dimmesdale’s seduction reaches the final stage that awaited the female heroines of many of the popular seduction novels of Hawthorne’s day. As Kreger observes:

By the time that Dimmesdale emerges from his forest meeting with Hester, we might read him as seduced several times over—having begot Pearl, been violated by Chillingworth, and yielded to Hester's radical ideas. So perhaps it is fitting that he should then suffer the next stage of the seduced heroine's decline: madness.  
(Kreger, 323)

On his way back to the town, we see this “madness” taking over Dimmesdale’s rational judgment and moral sense. This comes upon him in the form of several temptations. “At every step” he becomes tempted to do “some strange, wild, wicked thing or other.” (Hawthorne, 139) Four particular temptations are described. He comes upon the first when he happens upon one of his own church deacons. He is an elder in the church, and Dimmesdale has always deeply respected the man, but, in this moment, he is strongly tempted to utter “certain blasphemous suggestions that rose into his mind, respecting the communion-supper” (139) for no better reason than to laugh at the old man’s shock at his impiety. Dimmesdale is terrified at finding this strong compulsion within him, but this is followed immediately by the second temptation. He sees the eldest woman in his church—a widow. He has an established relationship with the woman whereby he always offers her words of encouragement in her faith whenever they meet. This time, however, Dimmesdale can think of no spiritual encouragement to offer her. “As the great enemy of souls would have it” he instead is struck with an “unanswerable argument against the

immortality of the human soul.” (139) After passing the eldest woman of the church, Dimmesdale is met with his third temptation when he encounters the youngest. Dimmesdale himself had recently convinced this young woman “to barter the transitory pleasures of this world for the heavenly hope.” (Hawthorne, 140) While the meaning of this phrase is not entirely clear, it can at least be assumed that Dimmesdale has convinced her that God’s morals are to be sought after rather than “pleasures of the world,” and that she should live a pure life. It is this very “virgin soul” (140) that he is tempted to look at in an obviously lustful way that would have communicated itself quite clearly to her. He is even tempted to impart “a single word” upon her that would accurately reflect his lustful stare. As a result, he quickly runs past her, leaving the young woman, confused, hurt, and upset. His final temptation is a rather startling one. He happens upon a group of very young Puritan children. They are just old enough to have started learning to talk. He desires to teach these children “very wicked words,” (140) which, by today’s standards, would probably have equated to obscenities and/or profanities. Dimmesdale barely avoids succumbing to this final temptation. It is at this point that Dimmesdale ponders, “Am I mad? or [sic] am I given over utterly to the fiend? Did I make a contract with him in the forest, and sign it with my blood?” (140) This reference to “signing a contract with my own blood” recalls the passage in which Pearl asks Hester if she signed the Black Man’s book. It is here that Hester suggested that she wears the Black Man’s mark—that she is a fallen woman—a “whore” given over to the Devil. In emerging out of the forest with this “whore,” Dimmesdale now ponders if, in giving himself over to Hester, he did, in fact, give himself over to evil.

To even further enforce the idea of Hester as “dark seductress” who has effectively “spiritually raped” the emasculated Dimmesdale, it is at this moment that he encounters Miss Hibbins, the witch, who has expressed to Hester that the two of them “wear the same mark.”

Hibbins immediately senses the change in Dimmesdale, and remarks that he must have visited the forest. When Dimmesdale swears he was not up to anything “unusual” there, the “old-witch lady” responds “Well, well, we must needs talk thus in the daytime! You carry it off like an old hand! But at midnight, and in the forest, we shall have other talk together!” (Hawthorne, 141) Hibbins now recognizes Dimmesdale as a kindred spirit, and her suggestion of meeting together in the forest at midnight recalls Goodman Brown’s encounter in the forest that almost leads to his initiation into a group of Satanists. This exchange convinces Dimmesdale that, in giving himself over to Hester, he has been effectively seduced by the Devil. This illustrates Herbert’s definition of the “angel-whore dichotomy” in which the “stainless girl” becomes a “polluted thing,” (Herbert, 115) and also reflects the inversion of sexual roles essential to his concept of pornographic manhood.

While Dimmesdale is here converted into a victimized, seduced female, Hawthorne further complicates the relationship between him by showing how this new energy that Hester gives him is the catalyst for his greatest sermon, and his ultimate confession. As Jennifer Fleischner points out in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, “Dimmesdale’s encounter with Hester’s eroticism is linked to his most intense religious feelings and his most inspired sermon. For out of the channeled energies of this sexual, creative, and religious passion . . . Dimmesdale writes his greatest sermon, which will be the vehicle for his final confession.” (Fleischner, 522) At the end of “The Minister in a Maze,” Dimmesdale discards his previously written sermon and begins to write a new one “with such an impulsive flow of thought and emotion, that he fancied himself inspired.” (Hawthorne, 143) On the day of the festival, after delivering his great sermon, he walks onto the scaffold in front of all the people in preparation for his confession, but, first, he calls Hester to join him, asking her to “twine thy strength about me! . . . Support me up yonder

scaffold!” (160) Having been given the necessary courage by Hester in the forest, he still needs her strength in order to finally do what he has always believed was right. Dimmesdale has now become the “empowered female,” able to be strong and courageous, but only with the support of “her man,” Hester. The roles have been completely reversed, from the perspective of society, and from the narrative standpoint of the then-popular seduction novel. Dimmesdale’s pornographic manhood is all that remains.

### Roger Chillingworth and the Rape of Arthur Dimmesdale

While we can certainly see aspects of Herbert’s pornographic manhood present through Dimmesdale’s relationship with Hester, his relationship with Chillingworth further exposes him as the model for this concept. Chillingworth, perhaps more so than Hester, emasculates Dimmesdale through sexualized victimization. Kreger emphasizes this when she says that, “He [Dimmesdale] is reduced to a ‘poor, forlorn creature’, cast in the role of the victimized girl at the mercy of the conscienceless seducer played by Chillingworth.” (Kreger, 323)

Dimmesdale’s “violation” at the hands of Roger Chillingworth begins shortly after the young minister’s health takes a turn for the worse. Chillingworth begins caring for him as his physician. At this point, Dimmesdale’s inner torment becomes markedly more severe. Hawthorne describes his relationship with Chillingworth when he says that Arthur Dimmesdale “was haunted either by Satan himself, or Satan’s emissary, in the guise of old Roger Chillingworth.” (Hawthorne, 86)

The violation does not present Dimmesdale as emasculated, however, until the end of chapter ten, “The Leech and His Patient.” At this point Chillingworth has grown very suspicious of the minister, and is sure that he is hiding something. He waits for him to fall asleep in his bed.

At this point, Chillingworth creeps stealthily into his room. He then “advanced directly in front of his patient, laid his hand upon his bosom, and thrust aside the vestment.” (Hawthorne, 92)

The language Hawthorne uses here intentionally suggests sexual violation, as Dimmesdale, already victimized, now has Chillingworth creeping up to him in his bed and forcefully tearing away an article of clothing against the minister’s will. The idea further suggests a kind of “penetrative rape” when Chillingworth sees Dimmesdale’s scarlet letter. He reacts to this intimate discovery with “wonder, joy” and “ghastly rapture.” (92) Hawthorne describes it as the “moment of his ecstasy.” (92) Chillingworth receives great joy and pleasure from his violation of Dimmesdale’s intimately guarded secret, and the discovery of his scarlet letter is the physician’s “moment of ecstasy”, a phrase suggestive of physical sexual climax. Leverenz makes this same connection when he remarks:

It seems obvious to post-Freudian readers that Chillingworth's revengeful penetration into Dimmesdale's bosom constitutes the climactic moment of physical intimacy in the story. His intrusive, sadistic rape first awakens protracted “throb[s] of pain,” then culminates in the “moment of his ecstasy,” when his discovery of what lies on the sleeping minister's chest sends Dimmesdale into a ‘shudder’ and Chillingworth into a “ghastly rapture” of riotous gestures. (Leverenz, 568)

Indeed, as Kreger further points out, “Here Chillingworth is the betrayer, and his assault of the sleeping minister is ‘a parody of the sexual act.’” (Kreger, 323) Chillingworth responds to Dimmesdale’s letter in much the same way that the town responded to Hester’s; however, while Hester’s “rape” was public, Dimmesdale’s is personal. Dimmesdale cannot reveal his secret to anyone else, and Chillingworth exploits this in order to control him. He has become the

victimized “damsel in distress” that later requires Hester, his “knight in shining armor,” to step in and rescue him from the “castle” the physician has imprisoned him within.

From this point on, Chillingworth sets out to further victimize and emasculate Dimmesdale. This further suggests rape when Hawthorne describes Chillingworth’s new plans as an “intimate revenge.” (Hawthorne, 92) Indeed, Dimmesdale becomes, in a sense, a sexual slave to old Roger Chillingworth. When he tries to spend time with Hester and Pearl one night upon the scaffold, Chillingworth comes and takes him away from the person he sexually desires so that he can further rape and torture the poor minister. Even this Hawthorne describes in sexually suggestive language, especially to a contemporary reader. Chillingworth calls out to Dimmesdale, saying “let me lead you home!” (103) Dimmesdale replies by flatly stating, “I will go home with you.” (103) Though Dimmesdale would rather stay with Hester, he acquiesces to Chillingworth because he is afraid of being sexually exposed. He has become much like the woman in an abusive relationship that stays with her man for fear of what he might do if she resists. Chillingworth is eager to “take him home” and Dimmesdale gives him what he desires.

Dimmesdale’s rape continues for several years, and it is not until Hester “rescues” him in the forest that he is finally given the strength to publicly confess and thus free himself from Chillingworth’s power over him. When Hester sees him in the forest, he has become completely emptied and utterly dependent. He has been completely feminized, forcing Hester to take on the masculine role in order to save him. After returning to the physician after his encounter with Hester in the forest, Chillingworth plans to administer his usual medicines, but Dimmesdale refuses. As usual, the physician insists, and, previously in the novel, Dimmesdale always gave in . . . but not this time. This time he insists that he no longer needs Chillingworth’s medicines, and the latter finally stops pressing the issue. For the first time, Dimmesdale is able to fight back,

and is no longer the victimized “damsel in distress.” Just before his confession, Chillingworth tries to “snatch back his victim” (Hawthorne, 159), but Dimmesdale thwarts his attempt, exclaiming, “Ha, tempter! Methinks thou art too late! . . . Thy power is not what it was! With God’s help, I shall escape thee now!” (159-60) Supported upon the scaffold by Hester’s strength, Dimmesdale finally is able to thwart Chillingworth’s power over him once and for all. He has become a man again to Chillingworth, who no longer has the minister as his victim, to continually rape and empty as he sees fit. However, this does not mean that Dimmesdale recovers his masculine strength. Rather, he has left his “abusive relationship” with Chillingworth to be with Hester, who becomes his “man”, empowering him through the intimacy of their relationship. His reconnecting with the fallen, "erotic" woman, Hester, who becomes his "manly" seducer, empowers him to make his own decisions. He has become submissive to Hester, and is now the idealized woman of both his Puritan society, and of Hawthorne’s readership.

### Sexual Shame

Recall in the introduction that this essay argues in favor of *The Scarlet Letter* as a novel about sexual enslavement for *both* men and women, but that such enslavement originated with men, who feel shame and guilt over their own sexuality, which they cannot control in the way they believe a man is supposed to. It is this very guilt that Dimmesdale suffers under.

While Hester and Chillingworth enslave and emasculate him, the minister would never have been so vulnerable in the first place if he was not already enslaving and emasculating himself. As Leverenz explains, “Dimmesdale's self-preoccupied guilt . . . licenses Chillingworth's rage for penetration, possession, and violation.” (Leverenz, 568)

Chillingworth's sexualized "rape" of Dimmesdale could only take place once Dimmesdale allowed himself to take on the role of the feminine victim. As Herbert points out, this allows Chillingworth to turn the minister "into a 'woman.'" (Herbert, 118)

The town notices something wrong with Dimmesdale early in the novel, and wonder, "Did he wish to die?" (Hawthorne, 82), and this concern is what brings Roger Chillingworth in to "care for" Dimmesdale. The young minister, however, knows the physician will not do him any good, stating, "I need no medicine." (81) Dimmesdale knows that his ailment is psychosomatic, and that the roots of his problem are spiritual in nature. Many young ladies in the town are even willing to marry Dimmesdale and "care for him", but he flatly refuses. While the townspeople wonder why, it is likely Dimmesdale's sexual guilt will not allow him to engage in marriage with a Godly, "pure" woman because of his own fallen status. Indeed, Dimmesdale cannot forgive himself because he believes his sin with Hester is unforgivable. When explaining to Chillingworth why some men do not confess their sins, he says, "they shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, thenceforward, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service." (88) He believes confession is useless because the sin cannot be redeemed, even through a lifetime of being in God's service. In effect, Dimmesdale sees himself as doomed—cursed to "go about among their fellow-creatures, looking as pure as new-fallen snow; while their hearts are all speckled and spotted with iniquity of which they cannot rid themselves." (88) In other words, he is forced to live a lie—to pretend to be a pure minister of God, when, in his mind, he is anything but. Worse yet, the town venerates him as a symbol of holiness. The virgin women of his church even "grew pale around him." (95) Dimmesdale's hypocrisy causes him to loathe "his miserable self!" (96)

As with his torture at the hands of Hester and Chillingworth, Dimmesdale's self-torture is also sexualized, particularly in the following excerpt:

His inward trouble drove him to practices more in accordance with the old, corrupted faith of Rome, than with the better light of the church in which he had been born and bred. In Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, under lock and key, there was a bloody scourge. Oftentimes, this Protestant and Puritan divine had plied it on his own shoulders; laughing bitterly at himself the while, and smiting so much the more pitilessly because of that bitter laugh. (Hawthorne, 96)

Herbert sees this passage as key to his argument that Dimmesdale represents pornographic manhood and the sexual guilt men feel over it. As he explains, "The violence that the 'manly' Arthur brings against the 'womanly' Arthur is autoerotic, it is a self-rape. He languishes in the toils of a contaminated femininity and lashes himself into a frenzy of loathing, which is also a frenzy of arousal." (Herbert, 117) As explained in the previous chapter, the men's (and "manlike" women's) public humiliation of Hester was a form of communal rape. In the passage above, the masculine Dimmesdale humiliates himself for his sins. He punishes himself for his "fallen status." Much like Hester, he too is a "fallen woman" who must be made an example of. His laugh during this self-torture is the only time mentioned in the book where the minister physiologically responds to anything in a way generally associated with positive emotions. Indeed, Dimmesdale appears to be "getting off" on punishing himself in much the same way that the town "got off" on Hester's public punishment. While Hester has been turned into a sexual scapegoat by her community, the masculine Dimmesdale scapegoats the feminine Dimmesdale. He is scapegoating *himself*!

### The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter

At the end of the novel, Dimmesdale concludes his confession by bearing his breast to the entire town, exposing the entire community to his own scarlet letter. This is the ultimate explanation the novel gives as to why the minister could often be seen holding his hand over his heart as if it were in pain. However, Hawthorne considers it inappropriate to divulge his readers the exact nature of what the people saw. The townspeople describe it as “a SCARLET LETTER [sic]—the very semblance of that worn by Hester Prynne—imprinted in the flesh.” (Hawthorne, 162). This would seem to most likely indicate a deep red scar on Arthur’s breast in the shape of the letter “A.” After Dimmesdale’s death, the town devises three different theories as to the origin of Dimmesdale’s letter. The first was that he inflicted “a hideous torture on himself.” (162) In other words, Dimmesdale carved the letter into his chest. The second was that Chillingworth had caused it to appear “through the agency of magic and poisonous drugs.” (162-3). In other words, Chillingworth, in his plans for “intimate vengeance”, used his “feminine witchcraft” to make the letter appear on Dimmesdale’s chest. The third was that Dimmesdale’s letter was caused by the “ever active tooth of remorse, gnawing from the inmost heart outwardly, and at last manifesting Heaven’s dreadful judgment by the visible presence of the letter.” (163) There are two ways of understanding this final theory. The first is that the letter was a judgment upon Dimmesdale inflicted by God. The second is that it was caused by the severity of Dimmesdale’s own inward guilt. This final theory, and its second interpretation, seems to be the one preferred by Hawthorne, who calls this the theory adopted by “those best able to appreciate the minister’s peculiar sensibility, and the wonderful operation of the spirit upon the body.” (163) This also strongly indicates that the second interpretation of the theory is

the one Hawthorne endorses, as the theory was adopted by those who best understood the minister's tendency to be psychosomatic. Regardless of which theory one holds to, the point is still made that Dimmesdale's letter was most likely either self-inflicted, or he complicitly allowed it to be inflicted upon him. Herbert merges the theories when he argues, "The scarlet letter on Arthur's breast was produced by the sexualized hatred that Roger feels for Arthur in collaboration with the hatred that Arthur feels for himself." (Herbert, 118) Just as Hester's letter was a symbol for her community's sexual guilt, Dimmesdale's letter is a symbol for his *own* sexual guilt. This supports the theory that the sexual enslavement in the novel began with men who cannot get over their own sexual guilt. While Hester is enslaved through the scarlet letter that scapegoats her, Dimmesdale's is the *true* scarlet letter. Dimmesdale confirms this in his own confession, asking the people to "look again at Hester's scarlet letter! He [Dimmesdale] tells you, that, with all its mysterious horror, it is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast." (Hawthorne, 161) In proclaiming Hester's letter to be a "shadow" of his own, he is essentially stating that his scarlet letter is the "real thing". Her letter is but a symbol of his own. Herbert further argues that Hester's letter "is a copy of Arthur's. Her public designation as a 'fallen' woman is a gesture of the manhood at work in Arthur's self-torture, and in Chillingworth's vengeance. The punishment Hester suffers and the brand she wears are the outward and visible sign of a masculine spiritual pathology that remains secretive and inward." (Herbert, 118) In other words, Dimmesdale, through his own and self-torture, and Chillingworth, through his secret revenge that ultimately destroys him, represent the male sexual guilt that is at the origin of sexual enslavement for both sexes. These men, in turn, made Hester, a woman, into a scapegoat for the sexual guilt that they themselves cannot find the strength to overcome.

Unlike most other men, however, Dimmesdale is not at peace with Hester being a scapegoat for himself, and thus he allows himself to be transformed into a “fallen woman” like Hester. However, Hester, a woman, is able to attain for herself a certain level of “masculine” autonomy and control. In *ATQ*, Cindy Lou Daniels argues:

Hester is forced by her society to display her guilt (in the form of the scarlet letter) though she does not really believe she has sinned; Dimmesdale hides his guilt though he has accepted his society's definition of his action as sinful. Hester is defiant of society even as she adheres to its strictures; Dimmesdale is so cowed by his society that he is unable to live up to its (and his) standards. (Daniels, 229)

Ironically, in being condemned by society, Hester is also freed from it. Dimmesdale never has this advantage. He is a slave to his society's standards, and thus dies for his sins, turning Dimmesdale into something akin to a Christ-like sacrificial figure. In dying with the scarlet letter upon his heart, he is “taking on the sins of the world”, or, in this case, of his community, turning Dimmesdale into the true scapegoat. This total inversion of the traditional sexual roles turns Hester and Dimmesdale into models for Herbert's pornographic manhood that lies behind the masculine origins of sexual enslavement for both sexes.

### Conclusion

In analyzing *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of sexual enslavement, it is clear that Dimmesdale reflects the very core of this theme. He is introduced and described in feminine terms to set the reader up for his emasculation. This emasculation comes from three sources: Hester, Chillingworth, and Dimmesdale himself. After being “seduced” by Hester before the novel begins, it is clear that the minister has been weakened. Indeed he is no longer an

autonomous being and requires the support of others. Dimmesdale only regains any manly strength through his encounters with Hester. Her independent spirit has become necessary to his own empowerment, inverting the traditional sexual roles of the seduction novel. In his weakened state, he allows Chillingworth to torture and abuse him, making him much like the woman who remains in an abusive relationship out of fear of what her man might do. Chillingworth's victimization of Dimmesdale is highly sexualized and described as a form of rape. This rape, as well as Dimmesdale's self-rape, mirrors, in many ways, the communal rape of Hester, turning them both into scapegoated victims. Dimmesdale's guilt and shame reduces him to the status of a "fallen woman", thus completing Dimmesdale's modeling of pornographic manhood. Finally, Dimmesdale's letter is revealed to be the *true* scarlet letter. Hester's was merely a symbol for his own. This supports the argument that the sexual enslavement of both sexes began with men, who cannot get over their own guilt for not being able to adequately control their own sexual impulses, and therefore make women into the scapegoats for what is truly inside of *them*.

While *The Scarlet Letter* does, indeed, depict both sexes as enslaved, and unable to attain complete sexual freedom, the novel is not without hope. Indeed, it is through Pearl, the "sin-child"—the offspring of "forbidden love"—that Hawthorne presents to us his vision for a future in which a whole new system of male-female relationships will be established "on a surer ground of mutual happiness." (Hawthorne, 166) How Pearl reflects this future hope is the subject of the following chapter, and will serve as the conclusion to this thesis.

Chapter 3: The Angel and Apostle of the Coming Revelation: Pearl as the Model for the Future  
Between the Sexes Through Her Functions as Symbol, Woman, and Future Prophetess

The minister stands upon the scaffold in the middle of the night. He is desperate to make his secret shame known, but he knows that to do so would bring scandal to his entire community. Upon that scaffold stands a man who believes he must bear his secret burden for the sake of the community. In doing so, he has become a slave to the people for whom he must uphold their values and virtues. He is sexually enslaved by those he is called to serve.

The minister is not alone for long. Soon he is joined by the scarlet scapegoat herself. While the minister's enslavement is private and self-inflicted, hers has been thrust upon her by a community that takes pleasure in making her suffer for their own secret sins. She has been enslaved by the community that has scapegoated her.

With the scapegoat is the child conceived between the minister and her—the "sin-child." The scapegoat, like the rest of her community, views this child as the very product of sin—as the scarlet letter personified, sent to punish Hester for her unfaithfulness . . . but, in the middle of the night, as the child stands between the scarlet scapegoat and the emasculated minister, and takes both their hands, she knows that she is not defined by how they see her. She must save them both.

The child, in the freedom of being outside of society, demands that the minister "be true" and proudly proclaim to the whole community his secret. The minister refuses. While a Puritan woman would always obey her minister's wishes, the child is free from such "laws." Indeed, she is a law unto herself. The child will not give the minister the information that he wants because

he “was not bold.” (Hawthorne, 103) She has prophesied to the minister what he must do in order to be free, but the minister, like the scapegoat, is enslaved by the community, while the child is free.

This child is, of course, Pearl, the daughter of Hester and Dimmesdale. In the previous chapters, we have seen how Hester is enslaved by the community that scapegoats her. We have seen, in turn, how Hester has enslaved Chillingworth, and how this leads to his enslaving Dimmesdale, who has already enslaved and scapegoated himself. Pearl, however, is unique. While the rest of the principle characters in *The Scarlet Letter* embody sexual slavery, it is through Pearl that we see Hawthorne’s model for a future freedom between the sexes. Indeed, unlike the others, it is Pearl alone who is truly free.

Critical analysis of Pearl has far less history than that of Hester or Dimmesdale. Most critics have analyzed Pearl as “the sinchild [sic], the unholy result of Hester Prynne's and Arthur Dimmesdale's fall from grace, and Hawthorne’s way of presenting the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life.” (Daniels, 221) In other words, just as the scarlet letter represents the enslavement of Hester and Dimmesdale, Pearl is herself the embodiment of this sexual slavery. While this is not an inaccurate interpretation of the character, it is far from complete. As Daniels herself puts it in *ATQ*, “Pearl’s function as a living symbol . . . connected to the story only through Hester's heart and emotional acuity, fails to acknowledge Hawthorne’s complexity of character development in Pearl. In this analysis, she becomes nothing more than the scarlet letter personified.” (222) The problem is that most critics have only examined Pearl through how the narrator, and the other characters in the story, view her. What they fail to examine is how Pearl views *herself*. While the other characters do indeed turn Pearl into nothing more than a personification of the sexual slavery represented by the scarlet letter, this does not

mean that Pearl allows herself to be defined in such a way. What these critics also fail to recognize is that, throughout the novel, the meaning of Hester's scarlet letter changes—from adulterer, to Able, to angel. If Pearl is indeed a personification of this letter, it would follow that Pearl is also transformed in such a manner. Indeed, Pearl becomes a model for freedom between the sexes through how she functions as a symbol, as well as how she functions as a woman and a future “angel and apostle.”

This chapter will first examine Pearl through how the narrator and the other characters perceive her. This will be followed by an analysis of how Pearl perceives herself and how this models her behavior. We will see how this behavior affects both Hester and Dimmesdale, and how she becomes something of a savior to both of them. Finally, Pearl's behavior and its transformative effects will reveal her as the future “angle and apostle” Hester spoke of, who will reveal a new truth to “establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness” (Hawthorne, 166) and, in turn, free them from the sexual slavery that is destroying them.

### The Red Motif

The narrator enforces the idea that Pearl is the personification of the scarlet letter by associating her with the letter's color. Indeed, fairly early in the novel Hawthorne creates a motif associating her with the color red. Recall that this color is often associated with passion and sin, so it is not surprising that the symbol of Hester's sin would be scarlet. When Hester and Pearl go to see the governor, the narrator describes Pearl as having “fire in her and throughout her; she seemed the unpremeditated offshoot of a passionate moment.” (69) This is followed immediately by a description of her clothes as being arrayed in a “crimson velvet tunic.” (69) In

pointing out to us that Pearl's clothes are red immediately after describing her as "fiery" and passionate, these ideas become associated with the color in the reader's mind. At the end of this same chapter, Pearl sees a line of rose bushes, and, "Pearl, seeing the rose-bushes [sic], began to cry for a red rose, and would not be pacified." (Hawthorne, 73) Interestingly, Pearl has an unquenchable desire for a color associated with passion and sin, and for a type of flower that has often been used as a yonic symbol. Therefore, through Pearl's desire for a red rose, she seems to be representing a desire for feminine sexuality that those in her community would view as sinful. This may seem like speculation, except that Governor Bellingham himself clearly associates red roses with the same concepts in the following chapter. Upon discovering that the child's name is Pearl, he proclaims, "Pearl?—Ruby, [sic] rather!—or [sic] Coral!—or [sic] Red Rose, at the very least." (74) Bellingham's objection to the name is likely that a pearl is associated with the color white—the color of purity. This objection shows us that the governor, like the rest of the community, views Pearl as a product of sin. This product of sin is described by the narrator as "the scarlet vision." (74) In calling her *the* scarlet vision, the narrator is taking one step further by not just associating Pearl with red, but suggesting that her very identity is represented by that color.

In the previous chapter, the narrator explicitly tells us that Pearl is "the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life!" (69) We are told that Pearl's red clothes, and "the child's whole appearance . . . irresistibly and inevitably reminded the beholder of the token which Hester Prynne was doomed to wear upon her bosom." (69) Hester *intentionally* enhances this image of Pearl because this is also how the mother views the child. This same passage describes Hester's reasons for enhancing Pearl's image as the scarlet letter personified in the following way:

The mother herself—as if the red ignominy were so deeply scorched into her brain that all her assumptions assumed its forms—had carefully wrought out the similitude; lavishing many hours of morbid ingenuity, to create an analogy between the object of her affection and the 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 so perfectly to represent the scarlet letter in her appearance. (Hawthorne, 69)

Hester, like the rest of her community, views Pearl as the embodiment of sin due to the circumstances of her conception. Because of this, she becomes a reminder to both Hester, as well as the community, of her mother's sin. This, in turn, turns her into the same symbol represented by the scarlet letter upon Hester's bosom, therefore transforming her into a living, breathing representation of that letter. Just as the scarlet letter scapegoats Hester, it also scapegoats Pearl in the eyes of her mother and her community. Recall that Hester, through her public condemnation represented by her scarlet letter, becomes a symbol to the community for sexual sin. This scapegoats her. In making Pearl the very embodiment of that scapegoating symbol, Pearl is also made into a symbol for sexual sin. As a result, the "legacy of being scapegoated" is passed down from the mother to the child, turning Pearl into another social scapegoat.

In light of this, it may seem that Pearl represents sexual slavery along with the other principle characters in the novel, and is not truly a model for future freedom at all. However, this is an incomplete interpretation of the character—the one that most critics have argued in the past. To understand Pearl as the model for future freedom, we must delve even further into how her character is portrayed in the novel and, most importantly, what those portrayals mean. First,

we must start with this idea that Pearl is the scarlet letter personified. Recall in the first chapter that the scarlet letter Hester wears is endowed with a supernatural quality. When it is pressed against her, it causes her searing pain, and the same is even true for the narrator, who finds the letter in the nineteenth century during the Custom House Introduction. The letter also seems to endow Hester with the supernatural ability to see the secret sins of others. If the letter is supernatural, and Pearl is a personification of that letter, it would seem to follow that Pearl is herself something more than human. The novel examines this idea at length.

### Is She Human?

The idea that Pearl possesses qualities that could be considered supernatural on a symbolic level is often suggested in the way the narrator describes her, as well as in how Hester sees her. Early on, she is tied into the idea that women are witches who can cast spells. One of the first things the narrator says about little Pearl is that her “aspect was imbued with a spell of infinite variety.” (Hawthorne, 62) In choosing the word “spell,” the narrator seems to be suggesting a supernatural quality to the reader. Indeed, in this same section of the novel, Hester herself begins to question Pearl’s nature. She “could not help questioning . . . whether Pearl was a human child.” (63) The child’s own mother doubts that she is a mere human being. She further goes on to consider that Pearl may be a spirit:

She [Pearl] seemed rather an airy sprite, which . . . would flit away with a mocking smile . . . it invested her with a strange remoteness and intangibility; it was as if she were hovering in the air and might vanish, like a glimmering light, that comes we know not whence, and goes we know not whither. Hester was constrained to rush toward the child . . . to snatch her into her bosom . . . as to

assure herself that Pearl was flesh and blood, and not utterly delusive. (63)

Hester is so doubtful that Pearl is human rather than spirit that she must hold her to reassure herself that her fears are misplaced. In describing her as “remote” and “intangible,” as one who may flit away and vanish at any moment, it is suggested that she possesses qualities symbolizing the supernatural. This strongly suggests that she is from the supernatural realm. Of course, Pearl’s mother is a Puritan woman, so it would most likely follow that, in Hester’s mind, her child is either from heaven or from hell. The narrator makes it clear that Hester fears Pearl is from the latter realm. She is described as “an imp of evil,” (Hawthorne, 64) and she often scares the other children away “with shrill, incoherent exclamations, that made her mother tremble, because they had so much the sound of a witch’s anathemas in some unknown tongue.” (64) Here we see the idea that Pearl is “speaking in tongues,” but not the kind of tongue that would benefit people, which many Christians see as a gift of the Holy Spirit, but as angry, “shrill exclamations” that scare people away, which would seem to indicate a gifting from “the other side.” To Hester, it sounds like the incantations of a witch. Even the child’s toys are described as “the puppets of Pearl’s witchcraft.” (65) Recall that the novel often suggests that Hester possesses witchcraft, so it would seem that she has passed this down to her child. However, this idea is taken a step further with Pearl. Hester often sees a look in her child’s eyes that is “full of smiling malice . . . It was as if an evil spirit possessed the child, and had just then peeped forth in mockery.” (66) Hester wonders if Pearl is, in fact, possessed by an evil spirit.

Pearl herself seems to doubt that she is from God. When she asks her mother who sent her into this world, Hester declares emphatically—though after some hesitation indicating her doubt—that, “Thy Heavenly Father sent thee!” (67) Pearl responds by crying “positively,” “He did not send me! . . . I have no Heavenly Father!” (67) According to a Puritan woman like

Hester (and all Christians, for that matter), all human beings on this planet originate from God, who created them. If Pearl is not from God, which she seems to be certain of, then it would follow, according to the worldview of the people in her community, that she is an evil spirit sent by the devil.

Finally, this suspicion of Pearl's hellish origins expands to include the entire community. Hester observes that the townspeople "had given out that poor little Pearl was a demon offspring; such as, ever since old Catholic times, had occasionally been seen on earth, through the agency of their mother's sin, and to promote some foul and wicked purpose." (Hawthorne, 67) It was not uncommon in Puritan society at the time for people to view a child "born out of sin" as a child of evil origin and, thus, as having originated from the devil. Because of this, they fear that she exists for some "foul and wicked purpose."

Here we have seen that the narrator, Hester, the community, and Pearl herself all view her as something more than human, and perhaps even as a spirit, at least on a symbolic level. We have also seen that the supernatural "portrait" of her painted early in the novel suggests that she is an evil spirit from hell; however, the novel complicates this idea. Even in the passage from the previous paragraph, in which the townspeople view Pearl as a demon offspring, the narrator immediately points out that Martin Luther was himself viewed as "a brat of that hellish breed" by many of his "monkish enemies." (67) Here the narrator is pointing to the fact that the Catholic church of Luther's time viewed him in much the same way as the townspeople are viewing Pearl. Martin Luther is generally considered the first reformer responsible for the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. John Calvin followed soon after him, and from his Calvinist theology eventually resulted Puritanism, so it is unlikely the townspeople would have viewed Luther as a demon offspring. It would seem that, in bringing up this point, the narrator is questioning the

validity of the community's assessment of Pearl. This challenge to the idea that Pearl is of evil origin is further explored by looking at the various "supernatural functions" that Pearl serves for Hester and Dimmesdale throughout the story.

#### Demon or Angel?: Pearl as Punishment, Conscience, and Truth

In the early stages of the novel, Pearl is described as the scarlet letter personified. Therefore, just as the scarlet letter punishes Hester, so too does Pearl. As Daniels explains, "Pearl, described by Hawthorne as the 'effluence of her mother's lawless passion,' is the 'living emblem' of Hester's guilt not so much because she resembles the scarlet letter, but rather because she embodies what the letter can only represent—the very passions which motivate Hester's transgression, and the sufferings that accompany her punishment." (Daniels, 222) Now, whether or not this portrays Pearl as good or evil is open to debate. There is really no universal doctrine among Christians as to which supernatural forces are primarily responsible for earthly punishment—God or the devil. Satan is often described as "The Great Accuser" and as "seeking to steal, kill, and destroy," so some view earthly punishment as primarily the result of the devil. However, punishment that leads to guilt and subsequent repentance is viewed by many Christian denominations as Godly in origin. The Puritans most certainly viewed punishment as "God's work." In fact, it is at the core of the entire novel, and is the justification for forcing Hester to wear the scarlet letter. Therefore, it follows that, from the Puritan perspective, the scarlet letter is from God; therefore, if Pearl is, in fact, the personification of that letter, then she too must be of Godly origin.

This Godly function of Pearl as punishment that leads to guilt and subsequent repentance ties into another of her supernatural functions—that of conscience. Many Christians often call

conscience—the internal voice that communicates right and wrong, and urges us to act on the former—the voice of the Holy Spirit. If Pearl is serving this function for Puritan individuals, then she is indeed fulfilling a “holy” purpose. We see Pearl evolve from punisher to conscience beginning in chapter twelve, “The Minister’s Vigil.” This is the chapter wherein, during the middle of the night, Dimmesdale ascends the scaffold and wishes to cry out his guilt to the community, but cannot find the strength to do so. He soon encounters Hester and Pearl, who join him upon the scaffold. Just as Hester has served to punish Hester, here she now also serves as Dimmesdale’s conscience. Upon taking the hands of both her parents, Pearl asks the minister, “Wilt thou stand here with mother and me, to-morrow [sic] noontide?” (Hawthorne, 101) Dimmesdale says that he will not. Pearl asks when he will do it, and Dimmesdale responds, “At the great judgment day . . . Then and there, before the judgment-seat [sic], thy mother, and thou, and I, must stand together. But the daylight of this world shall not see our meeting.” (101) Dimmesdale makes it clear to Pearl that he will not expose his sin publicly, something that Pearl clearly desires for him to do. Because of this, Pearl no longer wishes to hold his hand. She does not want any part of him until he confesses, as his conscience has been telling him to do. As discussed in the previous chapter, Dimmesdale’s conscience is represented by his own scarlet letter. Here we see Pearl acting as the voice of that, making her a personification of the letter, not just for Hester, but for Dimmesdale as well. When Chillingworth first approaches the scaffold, Dimmesdale senses the approach of a horrible apparition, and is desperate to know who he is. Pearl tells him that she knows who he is, but that she will not tell him. When the minister asks to know why, she says, “Thou was not bold!—thou [sic] was not true! . . . Thou wouldst not promise to take my hand, and mother’s hand, to-morrow [sic] noontide!” (103) Generally, Christians believe that refusing to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit hinders our relationship with

God, and the consequences can only be negative. If Pearl is indeed a representative or personification of this Holy Spirit, then it naturally follows that Dimmesdale's refusal to obey her leads to a lack of relationship with his child, and, as the novel progresses, we see Dimmesdale continue to grow worse as a result of the guilt that he will not confess.

As the novel continues, Pearl becomes the conscious of not just her father, but of both her parents. At the end of the meeting between Hester and Dimmesdale in the forest, after they have agreed to secretly run away together, Hester removes the scarlet letter and hurls it away from her. She then asks Pearl to return to her, but Pearl refuses to approach her until she puts the letter back on. Indeed, Pearl does not even recognize her as her mother until she does so. When Hester finally acquiesces to Pearl's demand, and reattaches the scarlet letter, she finally agrees to return to her mother, exclaiming, "Now thou art thy mother indeed! And I am thy little Pearl!" (Hawthorne, 135) Pearl believes that her mother should continue to bear the scarlet letter, as has Hester herself throughout the novel. She does not approve of her mother attempting to hide herself by removing her symbol. Like Dimmesdale, she wants Hester to continue to confess to her community. Upon returning to her mother, she asks her, "Will he [Dimmesdale] go back with us, hand in hand, we three together, into the town?" (136) When Hester tells her that they will be together at another time and place, Hester asks, "And will he always keep his hand over his heart?" (136) It would seem that Pearl recognizes the fact that Dimmesdale will continue to suffer from guilt until he confesses. When Hester does not respond to her question, Dimmesdale approaches Pearl to show her affection, but she refuses to let him. Once again, Pearl, as representative of the Holy Spirit, will not be in close relationship with Dimmesdale until he obeys her and confesses.

Near the very end of the novel, just before Dimmesdale's confession, Pearl makes it clear

that, indeed, she does wish for Dimmesdale to confess, because she knows that he will continue to suffer until he does. She says:

What a strange, sad man is he! . . . In the dark night-time [sic] he calls us to him, and holds thy hand and mine, as when we stood with him on the scaffold yonder! And in the deep forest, where only the old trees can hear, and the strip of sky see it, he talks with thee, sitting on a heap of moss! . . . But here, in the sunny day, and among all the people, he knows us not; nor must we know him! A strange, sad man is he, with his hand always over his heart. (Hawthorne, 146)

Here Pearl is pointing out the “falseness” of having a secretive relationship, and that, in pretending not to know each other in public, they are lying. She connects this to the fact that the minister always has his hand over his heart. This action, of course, represents the suffering that Dimmesdale endures under the guilt of his own hidden scarlet letter. Because he will not be public and truthful, he continues to suffer and, for that, he is reduced to a “strange, sad man.” It is here that Pearl explains to her mother and, thus, the readers, why she has functioned as Dimmesdale’s conscience. It is for his own benefit. This kind of conviction that leads to confession further solidifies Pearl as a Godly supernatural being akin to the Holy Spirit.

Finally, Dimmesdale makes his public confession. At this point, Pearl finally recognizes the man as her father, and she kisses them. The narrator then informs the reader that, “Towards her mother, too, Pearl’s errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled.” (162) Here the author finally comes forward and tells the reader that Pearl has functioned, not as a mere human child, but as a “messenger of anguish.” It was her job to punish Hester and Dimmesdale, and serve as their conscience, so that they would “do the right thing” and confess.

Finally, Pearl’s third and final divine function is as a messenger for truth. Hester wishes

to keep her secret hidden from Pearl, and Dimmesdale wishes to keep his secret hidden from the community. Pearl does not approve of this. Throughout the novel, she frequently tries to get her mother to reveal to her the true meaning of her scarlet letter. She never stops insisting upon knowing its meaning. She will not even allow herself to get close to Dimmesdale until he confesses his secret to the community. The minister seems aware that Pearl's intention is to get him exposed, which may explain why he tells Hester, "I have long shrunk from children, because they often show a distrust,--a [sic] backwardness to be familiar with me. I have even been afraid of little Pearl!" (Hawthorne, 131) While the community, as well as Hester, tends to view Pearl as a demon child, the novel never gives the reader any real indication that Dimmesdale views her this way. So then, why is he afraid of her? Keep in mind that he prefaces this fear by explaining that children tend to distrust him and not like him. This is not true of the adults in his community, who, with the exception of our other main characters, venerate him. The adults have no clue what Dimmesdale is hiding, yet the children seem to sense that something is amiss. Western society tends to view children as portraits of innocence, so Hawthorne may be suggesting that the children's purity cannot draw too close to the minister's guilt. They are simply incompatible. Yet, it is only Pearl he is actually afraid of. This child seems to show a special aversion to him. She has already tried to convince him to confess earlier in the novel, and public confession is the very thing he fears the most. Indeed, Pearl as a messenger for truth terrifies the minister.

Of course, by the end of the novel, Dimmesdale finally does confess, at which point the narrator informs us that Pearl's "divine mission" has ended. She will no longer "do battle with the world, but be a woman in it." (162) We have certainly, at this point, established the idea that Pearl is meant to be viewed as a divine force of good within the narrative, so the kind of woman

Pearl is most likely to become, by extension, is likely to communicate Hawthorne's model of a "good" woman. To determine what kind of woman Pearl is most likely to become, we must look at how Pearl is characterized throughout the novel, not just as a mere symbol, but as a real, flesh-and-blood human being.

### Freedom and Nature

The words that best describe why Pearl is able to find the freedom the other characters cannot, and thus transforms into a model for the sexes, are "freedom" and "nature." In *ATQ*, Cindy Lou Daniels argues that Pearl "has 'nothing in common with a bygone and buried generation'; [sic] she 'had been made afresh' and 'must perforce be permitted to live her own life, and be a law unto herself'." (Daniels, 230) This implies that "there is something (someone) new in the air, something strong and new and growing powerful as the law that once sought to strangle it." (231) Here Daniels is pointing towards *The Scarlet Letter's* Pearl as being exempt from "the law." Being a "law unto herself" suggests that she does not have to follow the laws that the rest of her community must abide by. Because of this, Pearl is, in fact, the only principal character in the novel that is truly free to live the way she wants, regardless of what others might think. As Daniels further explains, "Unlike Hester, who willingly wears the scarlet letter, even while she mocks the situation by adorning the letter (and Pearl) in elegance, Pearl is not willing to accept the judgment of her contemporaries." (230) While the first chapter showed us how Hester does indeed find for herself a certain level of freedom through rebellion, she ultimately makes the decision to voluntarily return to her community and wear the scarlet letter for the rest of her life. She had once imagined herself as a future prophetess, but believes she cannot fulfill the role because she has been "stained with sin." (Hawthorne, 166) In considering herself "stained

with sin,” she has ultimately accepted her community’s judgment over her in accordance to their law. Pearl, on the other hand, leaves the community, and never returns. Indeed, she becomes a rich heiress and, while her ultimate fate is never made certain, the townspeople believe she is “married, and happy.” (Hawthorne, 165) Dimmesdale is ultimately punished through the ending of his life, as is Chillingworth. Hester is punished for the rest of her life through the scarlet letter. While she becomes more respected and well viewed, especially by the women in her community, she remains an outcast within it until the day she dies. Pearl, it would seem, is the only one who does not suffer from “punishment,” but is instead blessed with wealth, happiness, and relationship. Pearl is free.

So what is it about Pearl that allows her to find freedom while the other characters remain stuck in sexual slavery? Daniels hints at this when she says, “Pearl is something new, created from the ‘freedom of a broken law’—from her mother's choice to commit adultery—and her mother's choice to dress up the punishment, which thereby fills Pearl with the notion of the beauty of freedom itself.” (Daniels, 230) Hester views Pearl as the personification of the scarlet letter, and so does the rest of her community. It is unlikely that Pearl does not sense this on some level. Indeed, she does not view herself as Hester’s “little Pearl” unless her mother is wearing the letter. There are also numerous points throughout *The Scarlet Letter* where Pearl kisses the letter. In fact, it is mostly the only place on Hester she kisses (according to the narrator). The child does seem to have her identity bound to the scarlet letter, to a certain extent, yet Hester dresses her beautifully. To Pearl, then, her identification with the scarlet letter is tied to beauty, making her a personification of beauty itself. She is not supposed to dress so beautifully, but she is outside the community, and, thus, is not truly subject to its laws. The law she is subject to is tied to the beauty that she represents. This beauty is described in the following passage:

She made the somber crowd cheerful by her erratic and glistening ray; even as a bird of bright plumage illuminates a whole tree of dusky foliage . . . The Puritans looked on, and, if they smiled, were none the less [sic] inclined to pronounce the child a demon offspring, from the indescribable charm of beauty . . . that shone from her little figure, and sparkled with its activity. She ran and looked the wild Indian in the face; and he grew conscious of a nature wilder than his own . . . Thence, with native audacity . . . she flew into the midst of a group of mariners, the swarthy-cheeked wild men of the ocean, as Indians were of the land; and they gazed wonderingly and admirably at Pearl, as if a flake of the sea-foam had taken the shape of a little maid, and were gifted with the soul of the sea-fire, that flashes beneath the prow in the nighttime. (Hawthorne, 155)

In the above passage, Pearl's beauty is compared to the bright plumage of a bird. She is described as "sparkling" in relation to this beautiful bird that "illuminates a whole tree of dusky foliage." Her beauty, therefore, shines forth in nature and enhances it. The narrator immediately connects this beauty through nature to the idea that Pearl herself is wild in nature, and thus a representation of the wild, untamed wilderness itself. Indeed, even the "wild" Native-American sees in Pearl a nature that is wilder than his own. The mariners she approaches are described as "wild men of the ocean." These mariners cannot help but admire Pearl's beauty, as they view her as the beauty of the ocean in human form.

This admiration for Pearl's wild beauty is very different from the view of the Puritans in the community, who view this same wild nature as evidence that she is a "demon offspring." As Daniels puts it, "the social authorities are viewing Pearl as a devil-figure, and they see her . . . connection with nature as proof of her mother's misdeeds coming out in the actions of her

offspring.” (Daniels, 223) Yet the narrator describes Pearl’s affinity with nature in nearly angelic terms earlier in the novel. When Hester and Pearl first enter the forest to meet Dimmesdale, the child sees the sunshine upon the ground and decides to “catch it.” In Hester’s sight, Pearl succeeds in catching it, and she is “brightened by its splendor.” (Hawthorne, 119) Pearl is bathed in “splendor,” suggesting an angelic being to Hawthorne’s Western readers. When Hester tries to step into this light, it seemingly vanishes. She believes that Pearl “absorbed it into herself, and would give it forth again, with a gleam about her path.” (119) Not only does the sunshine show Pearl’s “splendor,” she absorbs it into herself, suggesting that Pearl and the light of the sun are compatible in nature. Hester believes that Pearl will take this light and shine it forth from herself. This gives Pearl’s affinity with nature a divine quality. As a conscience to show others right and wrong, as a messenger of truth, and as a giver of light, Pearl becomes a Christ-like figure as “the way, the truth, and the light.”

Finally, Pearl’s affinity with nature is not just described as divine, but it is also tied to the very notion of womanhood. While in the forest, Pearl interacts with some of the animals there, and they all seem to take a natural liking to her. The narrator informs us that “the mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child.” (131) Here the forest is described as feminine. In saying that Pearl shares a kindred nature with the forest, it ties her femininity to the idea of nature. Recall that the Indians and “wild” mariners recognize the beautiful womanliness in the child, but the community of Puritans, with their social laws and customs, do not. Indeed, it would seem that there is a tension at work between “natural law,” as seen in Pearl, the Native-Americans, and the mariners, and man’s law, as exemplified by the Puritan community. Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth are all under man’s law to some extent or another, but Pearl, the example of natural law, is free. This suggests that model

womanhood, divinity, and, indeed, even the sexual freedom the other characters cannot find, requires a rejection of man's law in favor of this natural law. In regards to womanhood specifically, it is tied to nature. Nature is tied to beauty, and beauty is tied to freedom. Pearl, as a specimen of womanhood, exemplifies of all these qualities, which, in turn, transforms the child into Hawthorne's model for femininity. In regards to divinity, this too is tied to nature, beauty, and freedom. This makes Pearl the ideal model as both a woman, and as a being with a divine purpose. This is what makes the child the ideal "angle and apostle of the coming revelation." (Hawthorne, 166)

### Prophetess

Indeed, Pearl is the only candidate in the novel for the role of the prophetess that will "establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness." (166) She is the only character in the novel that may have *found* happiness. Daniels concurs with this when she states, "Pearl is the sole character who completely casts aside the Puritan definition of the female and breaks away from the Puritan community to find happiness." (Daniels, 225) The only character who finds happiness is also the only one who totally breaks away from her Puritan community, rejecting man's law in favor of her own natural law. As Daniels further notes, "Pearl's life would seem to those inside the community as one led by devilish concerns, but for those outside the community, those no longer encapsulated in that community, Pearl's actions can be viewed as angelic or 'good'—a foreshadowing of the change for the better women are seeking at the end of the novel." (226) Remember that the women come to Hester in search of this change for the better. She cannot provide it, but predicts that another woman will. Pearl is the one who rejects her community—a community of sexual

enslavement, as exemplified by Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth. She is the one who finds freedom and transforms into the ideal woman—one characterized by natural law. Finally, Pearl is the only principle character in the novel that is given the possibility for a future. In making Pearl the model of womanhood, and then giving her the hope for a future, it gives hope for a future to *all* women. Unlike her mother, Pearl does not live out her life as a symbol to her community, but as a woman with a life of her own. This life, in turn, is inspirational to women, as well as to the men who are enslaved by the law of their community. It is these men who have created man's law, and forced women under it by scapegoating them. In seeing Pearl's natural law as freedom, the men could abolish their created man's law, thus bringing about sexual freedom for both sexes. *This* is the coming revelation Hester speaks of at the end of the novel, which will “establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness.” (Hawthorne, 166)

### The Final Conclusion

This thesis has accomplished two purposes. First, it explored the possibility that *The Scarlet Letter* is a novel about sexual slavery for *both* men and women—on both a societal and personal level—as reflected in Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth. While the novel depicts both sexes as enslaved, the enslavement originated with men, who cannot get past the guilt associated with their sexual compulsions, which “fly in the face of” American masculine ideals of autonomy and control, and have thus created the “angel-whore dichotomy” in women to serve as a scapegoat for their own sexual shame.

The “angel-whore dichotomy” referred to a gender reversal Walter Herbert defines as “pornographic manhood.” According to Herbert, nineteenth century American literature

depicted pornographic manhood as a lustful force that conquers and enslaves a man, and ultimately destroys him. This was played out through the fantasy-drama of pornographic literature in 1850s America. It is one in which a man rapes a woman, but the woman adopts the masculine role in that she embodies the reality of his own sexuality. Specifically, the female represents the loss of control and ultimate erotic surrender that the male realizes is true to his own sexuality, but that he does not wish to face because it goes against his American masculine ideals of autonomy and control.

In analyzing *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of sexual slavery, it would seem that Hester reflects this theme on various levels. She has been made a symbol for sexual sin for all her community. She has become her society's scapegoat for sexual sin. Hester accepts her scarlet letter, and even goes so far as to view her own daughter, Pearl, as its personification. In this way, Hester has been sexually enslaved by her community. At the same time, Hester is also depicted as being herself a sexual enslaver of men. Her sexuality is likened to witchcraft by suggesting that she has a connection with Miss Hibbins, a witch, as well as with the "Black Man in the forest." Hester's sexuality with Dimmesdale weakens him and drains him of masculine autonomy and control, thereby emasculating him. Chillingworth, her husband, is transformed, like the feminine victim of the seduction novel, into "a polluted thing" (Herbert, 115) as a result of Hester's sexual sin, and this "pollution" grows within, enslaving him to the pursuit of revenge, ultimately sending him to an early grave. However, while her sexual "liberty" seems to destroy men, it ultimately appears to be freeing to herself, and provides hope for the women in her community. Her banishment from society frees her mind from traditional conceptions of morals as tied to community law, and this freedom ultimately makes her stronger than the men in her novel, especially Dimmesdale, her "partner in crime," who derives his strength and energy from

Hester, which ultimately gives him the courage to make his final confession. She does not, however, become a rebel or revolutionary, as the novel teases earlier. By the end of the novel, she is counseling the women in her town. She becomes a prophetess, predicting that a female “angel and apostle” will come and positively change the way men and women relate to one another.

It is clear that Dimmesdale reflects the very core of this theme of sexual enslavement. He is introduced and described in feminine terms to set the reader up for his emasculation. This emasculation comes from three sources: Hester, Chillingworth, and Dimmesdale himself. After being “seduced” by Hester before the novel begins, it is clear that the minister has been weakened. Indeed he is no longer an autonomous being and requires the support of others. Dimmesdale only regains any manly strength through his encounters with Hester. Her independent spirit has become necessary to his own empowerment, inverting the traditional sexual roles of the seduction novel. In his weakened state, he allows Chillingworth to torture and abuse him, making him much like the woman who remains in an abusive relationship out of fear of what her man might do. Chillingworth’s victimization of Dimmesdale is highly sexualized and described as a form of rape. This rape, as well as Dimmesdale’s self-rape, mirrors, in many ways, the communal rape of Hester, turning them both into scapegoated victims. Dimmesdale’s guilt and shame reduces him to the status of a “fallen woman,” thus completing Dimmesdale’s modeling of pornographic manhood. Finally, Dimmesdale’s letter is revealed to be the *true* scarlet letter. Hester’s was merely a symbol for his own. This supports the argument that the sexual enslavement of both sexes began with men, who cannot get over their own guilt for not being able to adequately control their own sexual impulses, and therefore make women into the scapegoats for what is truly inside of *them*.

Second, this thesis analyzed Pearl as the only free character of Hawthorne's story, and how she models Hawthorne's vision for the future between the sexes. In analyzing how Pearl is viewed as the personification of the scarlet letter, it initially seems that she is also a scapegoat. However, like the letter itself, Pearl is endowed with supernatural qualities by both the narrator, as well as the other characters. While the characters seem to view her as a personification of supernatural evil, the narrator challenges this idea. In examining how Pearl's divine qualities give her supernatural functions within the novel, we saw that she does, in fact, function as a supernatural force for good. Pearl punishes Hester and Dimmesdale, but it is not condemning punishment, like the community's, but the kind that leads to guilt and subsequent repentance. It leads Hester to not hide her scarlet letter, and leads Dimmesdale to confess his own. In other words, Pearl causes Hester and Dimmesdale to be truthful about their relationship, revealing Pearl's final divine quality that gives her a supernatural function as a messenger for truth.

However, Pearl is not also a divine model, but a model for womanhood, as well. This can be seen in how Pearl represents freedom and nature. Pearl finds freedom by rejecting her community's moral code and becoming "a law unto herself." She is able to do this through her affinity with nature. Pearl is identified as beautiful by the "wild" Native-Americans and mariners, and by nature itself, but not by the Puritan community. This "wildness" is further tied to Pearl's divine qualities, as well as her identity as a woman. Pearl, and those outside of her community, are under natural law, and are free, while those within the Puritan community are under man's law, and are enslaved. Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth are all under man's law to some extent or another, but Pearl, the example of natural law, is free. This suggests that model womanhood, divinity, and, indeed, even the sexual freedom the other characters cannot find, requires a rejection of man's law in favor of this natural law. This makes Pearl the ideal

model as both a woman, and as a being with a divine purpose—the only candidate in the novel for the role of the “angel and apostle of the coming revelation” (Hawthorne, 166)—the one who will “establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness” (166)—one not of sexual enslavement through guilt and scapegoating, but of freedom for both the sexes.

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