The Surveillance of Woman’s Body in Hawthorne’s Short Stories

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“She is the only being whom my breath may not slay! Would that it might!”—Giovanni, in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” p. 1000

“... sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance.” –Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p. 116

In many of his female-centered stories, Hawthorne shows the need to control woman’s sexuality or to insist upon her purity with a type of morality play whose sexual dynamics correspond to the theories of nineteenth-century sexuality that Foucault has set forth. As Foucault has shown in his History of Sexuality, it was not so much that sexuality was repressed in the nineteenth century, but rather that the bourgeois felt the need to control the sex (reproductive functions as well as family patterns) of the “lower” classes. Thus, there was a strange obsession and manifestation with sexuality, which was expressed in the many advice books and control mechanisms, but which ultimately had an outlet in the many varied forms of the discourse of sexuality, of which woman was often the central protagonist. Indeed, woman’s body becomes the site upon which the battle of the classes was fought. Hawthorne’s stories serve as vignettes exemplifying the compulsion to control woman’s body—as the narrators and male protagonists take on a Foucauldian surveillance. The scenarios vary but point to the same conclusion: unrestrained female sexuality (or unrestrained in the eyes of men)

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is perceived as a danger to the social order. Whether it is about a husband obsessed with his wife’s true but imperfect nature (“The Birth-mark”), a father who uses his daughter’s sexuality to further his own career (“Rappaccini’s Daughter”), an artist whose masterpiece is foiled by a woman’s too heavy touch and by the fruit of her womb (“The Artist of the Beautiful”), or a wandering bachelor who fancies the purity of a young child over the maturity of a grown woman (“Little Annie’s Ramble”), the upshot is the same: woman’s sexuality is deemed threatening, unless it is aligned with bourgeois ideals of maternity. Hawthorne’s short stories about women may be seen as dress rehearsals for his creation of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, the fallen woman whose redemption comes through her maternity and her good deeds within the community. But even maternity has its limitations: the men who father women’s children must be of a certain stock; the lower-class blacksmith in “The Artist of the Beautiful” will sire a monstrosity of a child, who destroys culture. Hester’s Pearl has the advantage of being a “holy man’s” daughter and hence has good “upper-class” origins. Though initially depicted as demonic, Pearl, with her good ancestral lineage, evolves into a noblewoman who returns to Europe. The compulsion of the narrator in the stories is to restore social order and middle-class superiority—even if that battle takes place over woman’s dead body.

To capture Hawthorne at his most candid in his chronicling of class and of woman as diagnostic tool for social equilibrium, the following anecdote from his *American Notebooks* is illuminating. Shortly after the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne went to the theater and, instead of watching the performance itself, he observed the spectators in the audience, which he announces “was more noteworthy than the play.” He becomes a spectator of the spectators and comes up with his own fiction about social class, which he records in a sketch in the *American Notebooks* (8 May 1850). In fact, he makes the point that the National Theatre, where he is attending the play, “is for the middling and lower classes” (501). He situates himself as an outsider among the working
classes (as Hester does with the “undesirables,” the Indians and sailors); thus, instead of taking his seat “in the most aristocratic part of the house,” he finds himself “surrounded chiefly by young sailors, Hanover-street shopmen, mechanics, and other people of that kidney.” The manner in which he talks about “people of that kidney” clearly shows that he feels distant, superior, but fascinated by the “picturesque” qualities of the working class: “It is wonderful the difference that exists in the personal aspect and dress, and no less in the manners, of people in this quarter of the city, as compared with others” (501–02). Armed with his bourgeois mentality, his vantage point allows him the privileged position as surveillant of the people (like Surveyor Pue in *The Scarlet Letter*). The focus of his theater visit, however, is two young women whose sexuality he voyeuristically tries to examine and analyze in an effort to explore the basis of the working class. Hawthorne describes one woman as “plump” and “coarse looking” but appearing to be “comfortable in body and mind.” What bothers his bourgeois mentality is his insistence on good hygiene, one way with which good morals were inculcated into the working class: she “had on the vilest gown—of dirty white cotton, so pervadingly dingy that it was white no longer […] the shabbiest and dirtiest dress, in a word, that I ever saw a woman wear.” He is not so shocked by her companion, a younger girl who was “small” and “pleasant,” but behind whose “vivacious” face, he detects, with the biases of his own class, a “hasty temper.” He seems to prefer this girl because her dress is “good” and “homely,” and because it is “proper enough for the fireside,” it shows her desire to emulate the middling class’s pretensions toward glorifying woman as angel of the household (and guardian of male sexuality). In a rather racist observation, Hawthorne then attributes the young woman’s vivacity to the fact that she “was not a brunette” and he suspects the duller, larger, heavier woman of having “a tinge of African blood.” This fear of the mixing of the races, the mixing of the classes, and the anticipated outcome that there would be pandemonium if the proletarian classes were allowed to propagate indiscriminately—since paternal
lineage, the mainstay of bourgeois stability, would be eradicated or shrouded in mystery—is Hawthorne’s main concern in the latter half of this sketch.

After trying to figure out which of these two women was the mother of the four-month-old infant in the booth with them, he goes on to observe the two men (one of whom is inebriated), seated next to the two women, in an effort to determine whether one of them is the father. Hawthorne tries to piece the puzzle together by making it a good bourgeois morality play: “I could not make out whether either of the men were the father of the child, or what was the nature of the union among them; though I was inclined to set it down as a family-party.” Later, too, he cannot abandon the scene without making good familial sense of this configuration presented by the “two girls, and their cavaliers”: “I should like well to know who they are—of what condition in life—and whether reputable as members of the class to which they belong. My own judgment is, that they are so” (504). In fact, the play he is watching, the pantomime “Jack the Giant Killer,” which Hawthorne describes as “somewhat heavy and tedious” might reflect Hawthorne’s secret sympathy or desire that the little man win out.

Hawthorne is not at all the stereotypical bourgeois prude when he describes the sexuality of the young girl (with great gusto he describes her breast), but perhaps only because he puts it in terms of her motherhood, so that he finds it quite “natural”: “the smaller of the two girls, after a little inefficacious dandling, at once settled the question of maternity, by uncovering her bosom, and presenting it to the child, with so little care of concealment that I saw, and anybody might have seen, the whole breast, and the apex which the infant’s little lips compressed” (504). Hawthorne, however, does not see this public display as lewd: “Yet there was nothing indecent in this; but a perfect naturalness” (540). Interestingly, it is through her sexuality that he enters into the hidden side of the working class and then domesticizes it. Moreover, he concerns himself with the question of parental responsibility. As
Foucault points out, the bourgeois appropriation of woman’s body “was carried out in the name of the responsibility they owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society. [...] sex became a crucial target of a power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death” (147). This, too, Hawthorne observes, with a sigh of relief, in noting that the child “purple with heat” thrives regardless of its milieu: “But I really feared it might die in some kind of a fit” (503). Though he notes that the child’s behavior mimics that of his parents, “it did not cry with any great rage and vigor, as it should, but in a stupid kind of way” (504); he concludes that children (of any class) “must be hard to kill, however injudicious the treatment” (504); “the child sucked a moment or two, and then became quiet, but still looked very purple” (504). Hawthorne leaves the theater, concluding that “It was a scene of life in the rough” (504), but with the cathartic experience that all was well in terms of class equilibrium and serenity for his middling class. Woman’s body has become, for Hawthorne and for bourgeois sensibility, the locus of public scrutiny: her sexuality has been controlled and regularized, reproductive functions have been legitimized, and sensuality has been approved through maternal definition. Hawthorne, as observer in this sketch, sounds like the many voyeuristic and moralizing narrators and male protagonists assessing women in Hawthorne’s stories and sketches. However, in Hawthorne’s stories, maternity has not yet become the redemptive feature of woman’s sexuality, as it would be in his first novel, _The Scarlet Letter_ (1850), and as it appears in this informal _American Notebooks_ sketch of 1850.

In “The Birth-mark” (1843) Hawthorne presents a woman whose sexuality is yet unredeemed by maternity. Indeed, like the young “Faith” in the earlier story, “Young Goodman Brown” (1835), Georgiana (in “The Birth-mark”) is perceived in a type of pre-sanctioned, pre-motherhood sexuality, as the honeymoon wife whose sexuality is seen as alarming. Both husbands, Brown (in “Young Goodman Brown”) and Aylmer (“The Birth-mark”),
become terrified of their wives shortly after their marriage. In “Young Goodman Brown,” Faith’s sexuality (as embodied in the inappropriate pink ribbons for a Puritan woman) leads Brown directly to the forest, where he would mingle with all sorts of classes, rich and poor, whose sexual indiscretions (seduction, infanticide) have led them to their doom. The forest is a morass where all bourgeois restraints have been lifted and where the rule of the “other”—the Native American (“Indian priests, or powows” [sic], 285) and dissolute criminals—seems to preside and where even chaste women by the light of day seem licentious. Goodman Brown is a classist—who wants to remove himself from the mob and from the unrestrained sexuality he associates with women. In the forest, women’s sanctity seems to be on trial: “Some affirm that the lady of the Governor was there. At least, there were high dames well known to her, and wives of honored husbands, and widows, a great multitude, and ancient maidens, all of excellent repute, and fair young girls, who trembled, lest their mothers should espy them” (285). This Foucauldian “panopticon” effect, to look at woman as spectacle, to enclose them in a restricted area, and to pronounce judgments in superior tones, is also common to the labyrinth/laboratory of Aylmer’s laboratory in “The Birth-mark,” where Georgiana is under surveillance by her husband. (This type of imprisonment is repeated in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” where the enclosed garden becomes Beatrice’s veritable prison.)

Georgiana’s “Crimson Hand,” as Judith Fetterley has commented on in the early wave of feminist criticism on Hawthorne, is emblematic of Georgiana’s sexuality: Aylmer’s “revulsion has its root in part in a jealousy of the power which her sexuality represents and a frustration in the face of its impenetrable mystery (27).” As a sign of her menses and her reproductive power (with the moralizing being described as bloody), it marks her difference, and it is a power that her scientist husband Aylmer envies and seeks to control. Indeed, he sees her “birthmark” as an imperfection in his wife and in nature that must be tampered with and eradicated. After years of aborted experiments trying to control Mother
Nature, Aylmer now experiments, albeit on a smaller scale, on his wife. Like the fecundity of a sexuality gone wild that marks Foucault’s depiction of the bourgeois fear of underclass sexuality, the birthmark unsettles and maddens the “rational” scientist. Indeed, it is somewhat more than rationality that finally unnerves Aylmer and that is the fear of the wildness he attaches to the meaning of the birthmark: “Aylmer’s sombre imagination was not long in rendering the birth-mark a frightful object, causing him more trouble and horror than ever Georgiana’s beauty, whether of sense or soul, had given him delight” (766). Ultimately, the “Crimson Hand,” emblem of Georgiana’s sexuality, terrifies him with the thoughts of class co-mingling: “The Crimson Hand expressed the ineludible gripe, in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mould, degrading them into kindred with the lowest, and even with the very brutes, like whom their visible frame returns to dust” (766, emphasis mine).

Even before Georgiana’s marriage to Aylmer, the birthmark elicits commentary from other male suitors. Her sexuality, her birthmark, becomes the focal point of their observations; they become obsessed with it. Like the prisoner in the panopticon, Georgiana becomes the symbol to decipher, though her own innermost thoughts remain indecipherable: “Masculine observers, if the birth-mark did not heighten their admiration, contented themselves with wishing it away, that the world might possess one living specimen of ideal loveliness, without the semblance of a flaw” (766). Her flaw is her sexuality, her association with the undecipherable and unvanquished Mother Nature, who appears to Aylmer’s scientific mind as “our great creative Mother, [who] while she amuses us with apparently working in the broadest sunshine, is yet severely careful to keep her own secrets” (769). With a touch of womb envy, the scientific male voice concludes, “She permits us indeed, to mar, but seldom to mend, and like a jealous patentee, on no account to make” (769). The ability to create is seen as a threat to the rational male who can only create in an artificial, not a natural way.
There is also a tinge of racial difference (the sexuality ascribed to the African American in the 1850 sketch above) that torments Aylmer as he observes his wife in the pre-experiment phase. He is “startled with the intense glow of the birth-mark upon the whiteness of her cheek” so that he cannot control “a strong convulsive shudder” (769). In the next moment, Aylmer summons Aminadab, the scientist’s helper from the nether territory, who appears to be necessary to Aylmer’s alchemical experiment on Georgiana. Though he is not described as “black” African-American, he does represent the fear of blacks that Toni Morrison points out that infiltrates most nineteenth-century American literature, if only on a subliminal level. His description is that of the “other,” whether African-American or working class, whose dark manhood threatens the white middle-class status quo. Frenetically, Aylmer stomps on the ground and summons forth the “bad soul,” Aminadab, to help him with his wife, who has fainted.

Forthwith, there issued from an inner apartment a man of low stature, but bulky frame, with shaggy hair hanging about his visage, which was grimed with the vapors of the furnace. This personage had been Aylmer’s under-worker during his whole scientific career, and was admirably fitted for that office by his great mechanical readiness, and the skill with which, while incapable of comprehending a single principle, he executed all the practical details of his master’s experiments. With his vast strength, his shaggy hair, his smoky aspect, and the indescribable earthiness that incrusted him, he seemed to represent man’s physical nature, while Aylmer’s slender figure, and pale, intellectual face, were no less apt a type of the spiritual element. (769–770)

With his shaggy, dark, and bulky appearance, Aylmer appears to be not so much the Igor of scientific Gothic as he is Hawthorne’s version of the threatening black man of the forest (in The Scarlet Letter) whose brutish physical presence threatens the more “spiritual” qualities of his “master.” The mechanical and physical traits ascribed to Aminadab are in contradistinction to the privileged intellectual and spiritual qualities of Aylmer; class distinctions are expressed not by lowbrow and highbrow, but by physical and spiritual. As Nicholas K. Bromell has noted, “Aminadab is the archetypal antebellum working man, and Hawthorne attaches to him the epithets so commonly applied to workers by writers of the dominant class” (104). Significantly, Aminadab, the
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physical man, opens the door to the boudoir, where Aylmer, the spiritual man, isolates his wife—instead of joining her. Showing deference to his “master,” as he calls Aylmer, Aminadab burns the pastille for his wife—and then comments to himself, as he “looks intently” at Georgiana, “If she were my wife, I’d never part with her birth-mark” (770). The man of clay (“earthly mass” as Aylmer calls him, 779), this man of the underclass, finds himself more at home (indeed, in the bedroom!) with Georgiana’s sexuality than does the fastidious husband of the intelligentsia. In many ways, Georgiana is more akin to the “natural” servant, Aminadab. And as Bromell points out, “Aylmer is Georgiana’s husband, but Aminadab is her truest friend and ally” (113). This is not so much a story of “how to murder your wife and get away with it,” as Judith Fetterley assumes (22), as it is a story of how to “whiten” one’s wife, make her more Anglo—by removing the taint of sexuality and race. Just as the grubby appearance of Aylmer’s servant, the underclass, taunts him, so too does the dark bloody mark upon his wife.

Like the slaves imprisoned on the plantation or prisoners in the prison (like Foucault’s panopticon), Georgiana is locked up in an enclosure and becomes the object of the empowered male gaze. Though other suitors and male surveyors/surveillants of Georgiana have idealized her birthmark as the touch of a fairy’s hand, Aylmer is obsessed with the “Bloody” or “Crimson” Hand, which, in its association with blood and procreation, is clearly sexualized. Fastidiously, he is “shocked” by the “visible mark of earthly imperfection” (765). The narrator juxtaposes the birthmark with a “small blue stain” which sometimes destroys a pure work of statuary—suggesting that it would turn “the Eve of Powers to a monster” (765). Thus, it is clear, in this comparison to Eve, that Georgiana’s sexuality renders her a monstrosity. Aylmer tells her that the experiment to purge her of her tainted birthmark would entail her seclusion in an inner apartment of his laboratory so that “he might have opportunity for the intense thought and constant watchfulness, which the proposed operation
would require” (768). Though her boudoir is decorated and scented lavishly, almost a place of aristocratic grandeur with its ornate adornments and gorgeous curtains, it is still dungeonlike since Aylmer does not permit sunshine to enter, for it would have “interfered with the chemical processes” (770). Aylmer locks her up in her separate sphere, the boudoir, and appears to have the power of the ubiquitous gaze. When she transgresses and enters the library of Aylmer’s laboratory, she is scolded mightily for crossing boundaries and she becomes the stereotypical “prying woman” (776) of mythology, a sexualized and demonic Eve or Pandora. Though she is finally eradicated, the threat of the underclass still lingers and has the last laugh; Aminadab’s “hoarse, chuckling laugh” is the last thing we hear.5

Similarly, in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844), Hawthorne has the sexually dangerous woman enclosed in her father’s garden, a type of Foucauldian panopticon. Though the circumstances are a bit different than those of “The Birth-mark,” man, whether in the shape of Beatrice’s father, suitor, or father’s rival, feels compelled to observe her, judge her, quarantine her, and ultimately destroy her for her alleged dangerous powers, which threaten men. Indeed, Carol Marie Bensick has made a very compelling case that Beatrice’s danger is indeed sexual in nature—that her poison is actually syphilis. Certainly, if syphilis is her deadly poison, one might wonder who infected her. But the males, in trying to decipher her, don’t seem to realize their part in her demise. Beatrice ultimately condemns Giovanni with her dying words, “Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?” (1004). A strange hybrid of sorts, with no earthly mother and a fantastic purple flower as sister, Beatrice is deemed “the poor victim of man’s ingenuity and of thwarted nature” (1005). Though ostensibly a virgin, her disease suggests a prior encounter with man, perhaps even with her sickly father, the scientist Rappaccini, whom she also condemns with her dying words: “…I am going, father, where the evil, which though hast striven to mingle with my being, will pass away like a dream—like the fragrance of these
poisonous flowers, which will no longer taint my breath among the flowers of Eden” (1005). Actually, all the male protagonists are complicit: Beatrice does admit that she is poisonous (1002), but that her poison has come from Giovanni and from her father. Though heavily allegorical, the story does seem to suggest that Beatrice’s malady is real—in that her breath can kill various insects and reptiles, as witnessed by the spectator/voyeur, Giovanni. But if Giovanni and Rappaccini have infected Beatrice, Baglioni’s supposed “antidote” is just another form of poison that finally kills her. All act as empirical scientists, whose search for the truth about her nature destroys her.

From a Foucauldian perspective, Beatrice represents a real danger to the bourgeois mind, a perspective represented by the thinking of the trio of male protagonists. As sister to the redolent purple flower, Beatrice also does appear to be too vitally alive, and her appearance in the garden causes Giovanni, the newly arrived student in Padua, to experience lust for the first time. The feeling she inspires is overwhelming, as he questions his own senses, “Am I awake? Have I my senses? […] What is this being?—beautiful, shall I call her?—or inexpressibly terrible?” (985). To the voyeuristic Giovanni spying upon Beatrice behind his window “within the shadow thrown by the depth of the wall, so that he could look down into the garden with little risk of being discovered” (981), her actions seem suspect. True, as in the panopticon, Giovanni is more a prison guard than a participant, but he does witness Beatrice’s inadvertent killing of simple life forms with her breath. And she does appear vampire-like as she embraces her sister shrub for sustenance: “with a passionate ardor,” she “drew its branches into an intimate embrace; so intimate, there her fears were hidden in its leafy bosom” (984). She needs her sister’s breath, as she tells the plant, for she is “faint with common air” (984). In an almost masculine gesture approximating a violation or rape, she plucks one of the sister’s flowers: “Give me this flower of thine, which I separate with gentlest fingers from the stem, and place it close beside my heart” (984). Two points are significant
here: on the one hand, her father has created her to be so special that she cannot imbibe the atmosphere of common people—and she is far more intelligent and beautiful than the ordinary woman (1004). On the other hand, her father has endowed her with his own spirit, so that she inadvertently, like the scientist father, also participates in killing or violating nature around her—not simply the insects, but the flowering “sister” shrub, whose dark hues are so similar to hers. It is only when Rappaccini begins gradually poisoning Giovanni that the possibility of marriage presents itself to the poisoned Beatrice (it is almost as if their class affiliation merges through the poison)—and that he, too, becomes a prisoner of the garden.

The nauseating fragrance and artificiality of the garden, Beatrice’s enclosed home, are as suspect as the isolated boudoir in which Aylmer imprisons his wife. Indeed, the atmosphere is enervating and diseased: the plants “seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural” (990). The strange “conmixture” of plants appears grotesque: “an appearance of artificialness, indicat[ed] that there had been such conmixture, and, as it were, adultery of various vegetable species, that the production was no longer of God’s making, but the monstrous offspring of man’s depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty” (991). Adulteration, whether it occurs between the different species of plants or the different social classes, appears in Hawthorne’s Gothic as the same “sin of the father”: the indiscriminate breeding or hybridity results in monstrosities, that are connected to artifice or artfulness. “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” though more complicated than “The Birth-mark,” does show the “upshot” of man’s compulsion to purify or ennoble women or man’s need to condemn the fallen woman. Certainly, the type of observation that Hawthorne engages in as he surveys the underclass women in the National Theater is characteristic of the male protagonists who try to decipher Beatrice and to make her sexuality acceptable to bourgeois standards of morality or purity.

Hawthorne’s “The Artist of the Beautiful” (1844), another story wrought with matrimonial fears about a young wife’s
sexuality, goes one step further in suggesting that a woman cannot even be saved by her maternity if she has chosen a husband from the improper class. Though the plot focuses ostensibly on the effete artist with his mechanical monstrosity, the butterfly, more artifice than nature, the subplot about Annie Hovenden/ Danforth, and her own monstrous offspring, cannot be neglected. Owen Warland, the “artist of the beautiful,” is seen as intellectually and spiritually superior to the two male protagonists, but in some ways he is feminized in a negative way: “the character of Owen’s mind was microscopic, and tended naturally to the minute, in accordance with his diminutive frame, and the marvellous smallness and delicate power of his fingers” (909). When he views a steam-engine for the first time, he is horrified and then “turned pale, and grew sick, as if something monstrous and unnatural had been presented to him” (909). With his sensitivity and refinement, he seems a parody of the bourgeois tastes of the middle class. Yet Hawthorne makes Owen just a cut above the ordinary—“in advance of mankind, or apart from it” and thus places him in a class by himself.

The sexuality of his childhood friend, Annie Hovenden, who is now a young woman (and hence poses a threat), is alarming to Owen—and destructive to the “whirligig” he works on at the outset of the story. Her touch destroys the dainty mechanized art he is working on; Owen then forcefully grabs her wrist, causing her to scream aloud. The murderous rage he feels seems extreme, a form of sublimated sexuality: “She was afrighted at the convulsion of intense rage and anguish that writhed across his features” (918). Like Giovanni who accuses Beatrice of her poisonous touch in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” Owen scolds Annie for not being the woman he thought she would be. Her touch, her physicality, is too real and dangerous; he admonishes her, “I have deceived myself, and must suffer for it. […] you lack the talisman, Annie, that should admit you into your secrets. The touch had undone the toil of months, the thoughts of a lifetime” (918). Like Aylmer in “The Birth-mark,” Owen has “erred,” according to the narrator,
in not allowing a woman to redeem him. Like the Romantic alchemist, Aylmer, Owen has deluded himself with an idealized image of woman: “he had deceived himself; there were no such attributes to Annie Hovenden as his imagination had endowed her with” (921). His rejection of the too-physical Annie sets the stage for her engagement to the more physical and base Robert Danforth, the blacksmith.

Danforth, “the man of main strength” (912), like the brutish Aminadab in “The Birth-mark,” represents the underclass sexuality that threatens the cultured world of art—and accepts the physical dimension of woman. Danforth’s touch is as destructive to Owen’s creation as Annie’s, and Owen’s delicate nature is disturbed by Danforth’s entry into his workshop: “He would drive me mad, were I to meet him often. His hard, brute force darkens and confuses the spiritual element within me” (912). Owen discovers that Danforth’s presence has caused him to destroy his invention: he blames “The vapor!—the influence of that brute forth” for bewildering him and making his own slip and ruining his artwork. Owen’s fear of strength and sexuality makes him terrified of an impending paternity that might create a monstrosity. As he admits to Danforth, “I am not ambitious to be honored with the paternity of a new kind of cotton-machine” (912). His fears of the products of the Industrial Revolution, in the shape of the steam engine and the cotton-machine, are associated with his fears of underclass sexuality and brutality, which he conflates into the notion of monstrosity: “Strength is an earthly monster” (911). Danforth jokingly comments upon Owen’s terror of sexuality: “No child of yours will have iron joints and sinews” (912). Peter Hovenden, Annie’s father, who favors Danforth and his masculinity over Owen’s effete nature, is also representative of a rigid business ethic which threatens Owen’s notions of delicacy and propriety. He admonishes him for attempting to touch and thus destroy his mechanical butterfly: “You are my Evil Spirit […] you, and the hard, coarse world! The leaden thoughts and the despondency that you fling upon
me are my clogs” (915). Indeed, for a time, Owen descends into madness, the rightful realm of women.

It is fitting that a real child, born of the bond between “the angel of [Owen’s] life that had been snatched away” and “a rude man of earth and iron” (921), would bring destruction to Owen’s unnatural child of the imagination, the mechanical butterfly. Both are perceived as monstrosities—the natural child and the grotesque imitation of Nature. Interestingly, Annie, as the angel of the domestic household, has tamed the beast in Robert Danforth: “...the Man of Iron, with his massive substance [was] thoroughly warmed and attemperated by domestic influences” (924). Danforth now compliments the artist’s masterpiece by exclaiming, “Well, that does beat all nature!” (928), perhaps in response to the all-too-natural child he has engendered. In fact, now that the blacksmith has been domesticated, he can touch the mechanical butterfly without any adverse effect; so can Annie now that her sexuality has been sanctioned through maternity. Though middle-class morality has softened Danforth through the lovely Annie, the product of their marriage (the monstrosity of the clash of two classes), their baby, is disconcerting: he has all the traits of the dreaded underclass. Owen perceives him as “a young child of strength, that was tumbling about on the carpet; a little personage who had come mysteriously out of the infinite, but with something so sturdy and real in his composition that he seemed moulded out of the densest substance which earth could supply” (925). In this baby, the “Child of Strength,” Owen detects the rigidity and shrewdness of Peter Hovenden and the brute force of the blacksmith, which will ultimately outdo him, as the child crushes the butterfly with his hand. Even before the child destroys his masterpiece, Owen knows that Annie, as “representative of the world,” would “never say the fitting word, nor feel the fitting sentiment” to praise his work (928). Thus, the laboring class, with their machines and brute physicality, has conspired to mock and destroy his vision of the ideal and pure; even the erstwhile pure Annie appears to be a traitor. But his creation, the mechanical butterfly, seems as corrupt and grotesque
as Rappaccini’s daughters; the radiance and gorgeousness are too intense, as it appears to be a mythical butterfly which “could hover across the meads of Paradise” (926). By removing the nature and physicality from the idealized beauty, these artists and scientists destroy the spirit of the creation they pretend to love.

The final story of this study, “Little Annie’s Ramble,” was written in the early stage of Hawthorne’s short-story career (1835) and is often regarded more as a sketch than as a story. Nonetheless, the impulse on Hawthorne’s part to appropriate woman’s body with a moralizing and normalizing voice is already present. The tone of the story is strangely perverse—little Annie becomes the Lolita figure of an adult man’s (the first-person narrator’s) imagination. His fantasy is to keep her pure, to keep her sexuality under cover, at the same time he imagines himself her suitor. Grabbing Annie from the safety of “her father’s door-steps,” he entices her into taking a stroll with him to the circus. Though innocent, the child becomes sexualized through the narrator’s gaze—“with her blue silk frock fluttering upwards from her white pantalolettes” (228). And though not a child-molester, the first-person narrator does show his preference for young girls over mature women: “If I pride myself on anything, it is because I have a smile that children love; and, on the other hand, there are few grown ladies that could entice me from the side of little Annie” (228). It is almost as if he would like to press her prepubescent sexuality, like a nostalgic flower, into a book to cherish forever: “What would Annie think, if, in the book which I mean to send her, on New Year’s day, she should find her sweet little self, bound up in silk of morocco gilt edges, there to remain till she become a woman grown, with children of her own to read about their mother’s childhood” (230). By preserving her sexuality as prepubescent and then rendering it maternal, he keeps her purity intact.

An unusual voyeur, the narrator enjoys looking into shop windows and exciting his desire nature as much as the little girl at his side does. But the consumer vision of desire is approved and even advocated by the emerging middle-class capitalistic culture.
He sublimates his desires as he vicariously lives though Annie’s longings. When he passes the window of a candy store, his mouth waters as much as little Annie’s; passing the toy shop, “the most wondrous shop in all the town” (230), he admires the desire Annie feels for the doll. In his mind, he remarks that the doll looks out from her window “upon many ladies that are also toys, though they walk and speak” (231). Though his comment sounds misogynistic, he is actually contrasting the purity of Annie with the gaudiness of the townswomen. Indeed, in the next instance he spots another shop window that encloses a parrot, who calls out “Pretty Poll, Pretty Poll” (231). The narrator criticizes her for being a “foolish” gaudy parrot and for imagining her beauty surpasses that of the innocent Annie: “she is not a pretty Poll, though gaudily dressed in green and yellow. If she had said ‘pretty Annie,’ there would have been some sense in it” (231–232). When Annie encounters the circus animals, the narrator also makes a comment about her dislike of the “unsentimental monkeys” (233). The narrator juxtaposes her innocence with the brutality of the monkeys: “the ugly, grinning, aping, chattering, ill-natured, mischievous, and queer little brutes” (233). Certainly, their resemblance to the underclass is more than subtle; the narrator states in the next instance that “Their ugliness shocks her pure, instinctive delicacy of taste, and make her mind unquiet, because it bears a wild and dark resemblance to humanity” (233, emphasis mine). To add insult to injury, the narrator grabs Annie’s hand and tells her to gaze upon the street, where “perchance we may see monkeys on horseback there” (233). By subverting the view of the disempowered (the doll in the window, the monkeys in the circus), he shows how little esteem he feels for the mass of humanity.

The narrator himself realizes he has overstepped the bounds of decency when he hears the town crier’s appeal for the missing girl, whom the narrator has inadvertently kidnapped. The town crier’s message reads like an advertisement for a missing bond servant (as in Hawthorne’s “My Kinsman, Major Molineux”): “Strayed from home, A LITTLE GIRL, of five years old, in a blue
frock and white pantalettes, with brown curling hair and hazel eyes. Whoever will bring her back to her afflicted mother—’’ (234). Annie’s sexuality has been held captive momentarily by the narrator, but the news of the grieving mother recalls his middle-class respectability; he remembers that he forget to tell Annie’s mother about their “ramble” and that she is now mourning “the loss of a little girl who has not once let go my hand!” (234). This naïve trust of the girl in the narrator is at once appealing (sentimental) and terrifying. He remarks that she is safe—that she can return “with an untainted and unwearied heart” (234), and that it is good for old men to “steal away from the society of bearded men, and even of gentler women, and spend an hour or two with children” (235). Interestingly, “gentle” women cannot revive him, but a little girl can. I am not implying that Hawthorne’s narrator is a child molester, but that his inclination is to imbibe the purity of a prepubescent girl, in almost a vampiric fashion. It also reads as a parody of the Transcendentalist Thoreau huckleberrying with the local children. As the narrator comments, “After drinking from those fountains of still fresh existence, we shall return into the crowd, as I do now, to struggle onward and to do our part in life, perhaps as fervently as ever, but, for a time, with a kinder and purer heart” (235). Here too the narrator reflects his bias against the underclass mentality represented by the tiresome “crowd.”

This compulsion to appropriate woman’s body—to control her sexuality and thus to foster good bourgeois notions of morality—culminates in “The Custom-House” introduction to The Scarlet Letter, in which the narrator feels compelled to tell Hester’s story at Surveyor Pue’s injunction. The ghost of Surveyor Pue charges the narrator to “give to your predecessor’s [Hester’s] memory the credit which will be rightfully its due” (147), and so the narrator reconstructs her history by focusing on her body. In many ways, the narrator tries to right the wrongs done to a woman on trial in the marketplace for her sexuality; the crowd at the scaffold becomes the sanctioned middle-class voice of Foucauldian surveillance. The narrator, however, seems to live vicariously through Hester’s
sexuality, as he places her fetishized embroidered “A,” upon his own chest, where it seems charged with the sexual energy associated with Hester’s fall: he “experienced a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of burning heart; and as if the letter were not of red cloth, but red-hot iron” (146). This statement teases the reader into feeling how close physicality can approximate spirituality; it is the same “neutral territory” evoked by the narrator’s Moonlight theory of romance. But as the narrative shows, he will make this a cautionary tale—and turn her passion into a sanctified motherhood. The short stories have paved the way for the creation of Hester whose sexuality is transformed, almost alchemically by the narrator, from adultery to maternity. She is no longer the gaudy spectacle of the Foucauldian Surveyor and surveillant, the woman who paraded her sexuality on the scaffold with her too lustrous hair and the wildly embroidered letter “A.” She is not the too-lush flower of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” or the besmirched woman of “The Birth-mark.” She has been transformed into the nurturing woman and is known to the town as its “Sister of Mercy” (257), a variation of the conventional True Woman, an extension of the domestic angel of the household. In her role as mother, even as a single mother, her sexuality becomes non-threatening, and in removing her status from lover to mother, the narrator does not feel compelled to victimize her as he has the women in the short stories.11

NOTES

1. Hester also descends from English aristocracy, though the decaying mansion of her parents suggests it is fallen aristocracy. Though her paternal home was “a decayed house of gray stone with a poverty-stricken aspect,” it “retained a half-obliterated shield of arms over the portal, in token of antique gentility” (SL 167).

2. Many feminist critics have noted Hawthorne’s association of women with social stability: Louise DeSalvo shows how Hawthorne felt that “any deviation from these prescribed [gender] roles would result in the total collapse of the order of society” (12). Joyce Warren also feels that Hawthorne finally capitulates to the “conventional image of female behavior” (189). Nina Baym feels that like the feminists of his time, Hawthorne realized that women were imprisoned, but
she feels that Hawthorne is sympathetic to women and tried to reveal the folly of male myths that distorted women’s psyches.

3. Joel Pfister recently came up with a similar conclusion about the woman’s body in “The Birth-mark.” He feels that the anxiety about woman’s body in the story reflected “common social anxieties or ambivalence about women’s behavior in biological terms. This was a pattern of displacement within the larger middle-class effort to control and reform bodies” (33). Pfister points to the prevalent belief in phrenology and the preponderance of advice manuals to discuss the culture’s fascination with the body. Pfister goes on to say that the compulsion to control woman’s body was related to the desire to control her social role: “this discursive management of the way women envisioned their womanhood was crucial to the ideological production of middle-class identity in uncertain times” (58).

Nicholas K. Bromell and Cindy Weinstein see woman’s body in the Hawthorne canon somewhat differently (in a less sexualized way) by focusing on the dynamics of labor in Hawthorne—and on Hawthorne’s anxiety about writing as his labor, his profession. To Bromell, Hawthorne evinces anxiety about the different types of manhood corresponding with mental and manual labor, and Hawthorne “situates the female body at the center of his dramatizations of problems of work because for him, as a male artist, woman’s body epitomizes a kind of creativity—labor—which at once attracts and repels him” (112). Cindy Weinstein also sees the centrality of labor in Hawthorne’s tales and explains Hawthorne’s anxieties as a male writer in the literary marketplace: “The allegorical sign of the birthmark constitutes the site upon which the drama of visible and invisible labor, or non-alienated and alienated labor, of dispossession and possession is staged. At stake […] is not so much what the birthmark signifies but who gets to claim ownership of it” (70).

4. Toni Morrison eloquently points to the black presence in nineteenth-century fiction, even if the presence is subtle: “Explicit or implicit, the Africanist presence informs in compelling and inescapable ways the texture of American literature” (46). She also asserts that “Black slavery enriched the country’s creative possibilities. For in that construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also […] the projection of the not-me.” (38). African-Americanism became “a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American” (38). I would add that middle-class notions of female sexuality and of underclass (im)morality are also mixed in this “fabricated brew of darkness.”

5. Cf. Cindy Weinstein, who believes that Aylmer tries to make both Georgiana and Aminadab “invisible.” Although Aylmer tries “to construct his gender relations along the same lines as those of class, Georgiana proves far more difficult to manage than Aminadab” (74). I think it is significant, though, to see that gender seems easier to eradicate than class, as Georgiana has the last word (shortly before dying), but Aminadab has the last laugh.

Though in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” there are three men (Giovanni, Baglioni, and Rappaccini himself) vying for possession of Beatrice, the dynamics that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick presents in *Between Men*, regarding the triangle between two men and one woman are certainly manifest in Hawthorne’s fiction, though that is not her intended subject. Indeed, in her introduction Sedgwick bases her paradigm on the love match by various suitors for Scarlett O’Hara. Woman is ultimately of no consequence; the triangle shows the bourgeois attempt to control woman for keeping the status quo of patriarchal power intact. Scarlett has to adhere to “the role of ‘lady,’” a role that does take its shape and meaning from a sexuality of which she is not the subject but the object” (8). I feel that Sedgwick’s commentary about Scarlett’s need to distance herself from her sexuality to survive can be applied to Hawthorne’s sexualized women as well: “For Scarlett, to survive as a woman does mean learning to see sexuality, male power domination, and her traditional gender role as all meaning the same dangerous thing” (8).

7. Gender critics have discussed Beatrice’s sexuality as threatening to Giovanni. Baym calls the story “an allegory of sex” and asserts that her “poison is her sexuality,” which is associated with “the deadly erotic flower” (108). Pfister associates Georgiana’s “crimson stain” with Beatrice’s “colorful features” and notes that the “unnatural, sexual quality” of the plants is similar to Beatrice’s “monstrous” sexuality: “Monstrosity is a metaphor for female ambiguity, desire, and power in the eyes of males” (64).

There is a sense that the too colorful, too lively quality of Beatrice is associated with the tarnish of the underclass. The Transcendentalist minister Theodore Parker lectured about the dangers of the underclass and pointed to their excessiveness as a telltale mark of their corruption. Their error lies in an “unintentional violation of a natural law” (287). In some ways, Rappaccini who experiments with genetics can be perceived as being such a criminal type. Parker also says that there is a class of criminal who commit crimes out of an “abundance of life and energy” (287). Beatrice, in her resplendent sexuality, seems to possess this unnatural liveliness and energy.

8. As critics sometimes point out, these stories may have reflected Hawthorne’s own anxieties about female sexuality, as he had recently married (in 1842). But the fears of sexuality are not just imagined. Conjugal sexuality probably was not as frightening as failed pregnancies, the possible upshot of sexuality. Before daughter Una was born in 1844, it is alleged that Sophia, Hawthorne’s wife, suffered a miscarriage. Certainly, the fears of bringing a “monstrosity” into the world haunt the pages of the stories I discuss dating from the Old Manse period—and Hawthorne’s “honeymoon” years.

9. This emphasis on Annie’s feminine beauty as portrayed in the town-crier’s description is eerily similar to Harriet Jacobs’ ad posted by her master, Dr. Norcom, who also focused, almost lasciviously, on the beautiful features of his escaped slave. Certainly, the narrator has already focused on these telltale signs of beauty even earlier in the narrative; this repetition reinforces his attraction to her physical beauty.

10. Motherhood has been seen as both a liability and as a source of redemption for Hester. See my earlier essay on how Hester uses her maternity in a subversive
manner to counter the negative assessments of the townspeople. Though she does adhere to many of the traditions of gentle nurturing, she redefines the maternal experience as part of her rebellion. I feel that Hawthorne affirms the centrality of maternity as part of the female experience—indeed, the novel may be seen as a tribute to his recently deceased mother.

Franny Nudelman reads Hester’s maternity as a failure in that her offspring Pearl misbehaves badly and appears demonic. Leland Person has recently read “black” motherhood into Hester’s maternity: “Hester’s abject dependence upon patriarchal sufferance for her mothering rights links her to her slave sisters, but her ability to mother at all marks her feminist difference from slave mothers like Harriet Jacobs” (44). John Gatta notes how conflicting pagan and Christian elements enter into the picture of Hester’s maternity but that ultimately, though not “the Divine Woman in any literal sense” but rather “only the town counselor-in-residence” (19), she does “fulfill a prophetic office as agent of revelation” (19).

Perhaps the most damning feature of Hester’s maternity is shown in the manner by which the narrator eradicates her passion, so that she moves from passion to reason. She is totally desexualized in the process, so that the initial maternal/sexual energy of the first scaffold scene is replaced by an austerity of thought. Significantly, her female sexuality is denied her as “her rich and luxuriant hair had either been cut off, or was so completely hidden by a cap” (258). The coldness seems striking in comparison to the initial picture we have of her juxtaposed with Divine Maternity: “there seemed to be no longer any thing in Hester’s face for Love to dwell upon; nothing in Hester’s form, though majestic and statuelike, that Passion would ever dream of clasping in its embrace; nothing in Hester’s bosom, to make it ever again the pillow of Affection” (258–59). Being deprived of all that is allegorically feminine, Love, Passion, and Affection, Hester is robbed of her womanhood: “Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman” (259). Though she has “assumed a freedom of speculation” and has thought revolutionary ideas, the narrator does not make it seem as if the (s)exchange is positive. Using the Foucauldian paradigm, one can see, on the one hand, that her dangerous sexuality has been punished and negated for the good of the patriarchal bourgeois status quo. On the other hand, Hester’s “marble coldness” is attributed to the fact that she has moved “from passion and feeling, to thought” (259); in some ways, this makes Hester immune from men’s power of possession (Dimmesdale’s and Chillingworth’s) because she has altered the terms of her femininity. She has moved away from woman’s conventional sphere to men’s freer realm of thinking. Dimmesdale, in contrast, becomes feminized, as he is rendered the victim of Chillingworth’s machinations (in Chillingworth’s rivalry for his affection, or power over him).

11. Though Hester’s maternity saves her, Hepzibah’s virginity or spinsterhood does not redeem her. In the next novel Hawthorne would write, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Hawthorne shows the more immediate danger of keeping woman’s sexuality and social class structure inviolate: Hepzibah, though chaste, is portrayed as grotesquely barren and non-nurturing. It is only through her renunciation of class consciousness, as she enters the laboring class as the owner
of a cent-shop, that she can be assimilated into the community. The commingling
of classes finally does not seem as threatening in this novel as it does in Hawthorne’s
short stories. Phoebe is the redemptive woman; though her father is a Pyncheon,
her mother is a commoner, so she can break the curse of the feuding families.
When she marries Holgrave, a descendant of the wronged underclass Maules,
she not only brings the families together, but she compensates for the sexual
atrocity committed by the mesmerist Matthew Maule against her forebear,
Alice Pyncheon.

See also Teresa Goddu’s essay on The House of the Seven Gables, which discusses
the significance of exchanging or circulating women almost as commodities to
reconcile class conflicts.

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