Considering Possession in *The Scarlet Letter*

Ellen Weinauer

Studies in American Fiction, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2001, pp. 93-112 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/saf.2001.0001*

CONSIDERING POSSESSION IN *THE SCARLET LETTER*

Ellen Weinauer
University of Southern Mississippi

In the much-discussed first line of "The Custom-House," Nathaniel Hawthorne announces not only his text's complicated attitude toward its audience, but also its even more complicated treatment of issues of demonic possession. "It is a little remarkable," Hawthorne writes, "that—though disinclined to talk overmuch of myself and my affairs at the fireside, and to my personal friends—an autobiographical impulse should twice in my life have taken possession of me, in addressing the public."[1] This line is interesting, of course, for what it suggests about Hawthorne's discomfort with the autobiographical mode. It is also interesting, I think, for the particular and peculiar trope with which Hawthorne figures that discomfort. In suggesting that the desire to disclose has "taken possession of me," Hawthorne intriguingly presents himself as the resistant victim of a sort of witchcraft, as one whose subjective mastery has been undermined by an apparently irresistible and demonic force.

Nor do these associations end here: indeed, the trope of demonic possession that is launched in this line makes insistent, one might even say obsessive, re-appearances in "The Custom-House." "This old town of Salem," Hawthorne tells us early in the sketch, "possesses, or did possess, a hold on my affections, the force of which I have never realized during my seasons of actual residence here" (11). Hawthorne attempts to explain this "hold" by describing ancestral connections, noting that the "figure of that first ancestor . . . still haunts me" (12), and that he feels tied to Salem as by a "spell" (14). Later, when he has "found" the scarlet letter in the second story of the Custom House but cannot, as he articulates it, bring the "dead corpses" of the narrative characters to life, those corpses stare at him with "a fixed and ghastly grin": "'What have you to do with us?' that expression seemed to say. 'The little power you might once have possessed over the tribe of unrealities is gone!'" (34). Hawthorne cannot create: a "wretched numbness held possession of me" (35). He is "haunted by a suspicion that [his] intellect is dwindling away" (37) and that he has lost the "poor properties" of his mind (39); he suggests that the man in civil service is, if ejected from office, "haunt[ed]" by a "hope" that he will be "restored to office" (38); having himself been ejected from his position as Custom-House surveyor, he describes his now positionless and "figurative self" as one who has been "decapitated" and is writing "from beyond the grave" (42).

With these descriptions, Hawthorne provides us with a return to and redaction of one of his most prevalent themes: the perils of authorship, which

he variously figures in his sketches, short stories, and novels as both dangerously powerful and dangerously disempowering. It is precisely in the context of issues of craft and creativity—in the context of issues of literary power—that critics such as Millicent Bell, Maria Tatar, and Samuel Chase Coale have read Hawthorne's treatment of witchcraft, mesmerism, spiritualism, and other "popular supernaturalisms."[2] Hawthorne himself makes an explicit link between his authorship and witchcraft, in a letter commenting upon the furor that ensued in Salem in the wake of the publication of "The Custom-House." Writing to Horatio Bridge, Hawthorne noted that "my preliminary chapter has caused the greatest uproar that ever happened here since witch-times." Through his authorship of this apparently incendiary sketch, Hawthorne becomes in his own configuration much like the Salem witches—a heretic who will only with great "good luck" be able to "escape from town without being tarred-and-feathered."[3]

It is undeniable, I think, that Hawthorne's use of metaphors of witchcraft and demonic possession signals complex attitudes toward the act of literary creation; but it is also worth noting that, unlike in his letter to Bridge, in "The Custom-House" Hawthorne is, for the most part, not the witch but the victim of witchcraft, not the demonic possessor but the demonically (dis)possessed. Taking note of this, I want to offer another way of reading the issue of witchcraft in *The Scarlet Letter*, one that draws explicitly on some of Hawthorne's critical seventeenth-century sources. In particular, I want to resituate the text's treatment of witchcraft in a Puritan history that insistently associates witchcraft with disruptions by women of male ownership of property. Like the witches and proto-witches with which she is associated throughout the novel—Anne Hibbins, Anne Hutchinson—Hawthorne's heroine claims an authority over property that leaves the text, and its author, deeply troubled, raising as it does the specter of male dispossession.

Indeed, the novel's disturbed iteration of this theme reflects a kind of textual urgency, reminding us that, far from being put to rest along with the witchcraft trials, this specter was hauntingly present in Hawthorne's own day. The antebellum years saw a great deal of public debate about laws of "coverture"—laws designating, among other things, the distribution of property in marriage. By the year of *The Scarlet Letter*'s publication, in fact, seventeen states had passed laws giving married women significantly more control over both personal and real property. Hawthorne's own state of Massachusetts passed acts—albeit limited ones—in both 1845 and 1846.[4] I do not intend to reduce *The Scarlet Letter* to a simple "thumbs-up" or "thumbs-down" on these matters; but in suggesting that we resituate the novel's treatment of witchcraft in a history of the meanings of (women-as-) property in marriage, I am also suggesting that Hawthorne's text exists as an anxious meditation on a pressing issue of its own contemporary moment. By examining the ways in which Hawthorne's seventeenth-century sources serve to frame and mediate that issue, we can make more sense, I think, of the ambivalence with which Hester's insurgency is depicted in *The Scarlet Letter*. We can also return to "The

Custom-House" with a perspective that allows us to better understand the anxiety about male (self-)possession—an anxiety captured in its proliferating metaphors of witchcraft—that so haunts *The Scarlet Letter*'s "Introductory."

Hawthorne, of course, knew his Bible as well as he knew his history. In his readings of the latter, then, he might well have noticed the rather curious reappearance of a Jewish sect, the Sadducees, when women heretics in particular are under discussion. In her 1637 ecclesiastical trial, for example, Anne Hutchinson is accused of Sadducism; Cotton Mather uses the term repeatedly in his treatment of witchcraft in the *Magnalia Christi Americana*.[5] On a quite basic level, the Sadducees, who denied the existence of resurrection, come to function in Puritan sources as a collective emblem of theological doubt. Mather makes this usage explicit in a story about a group of Indians who had once widely participated in "witchcrafts" and "confederacies with devils" but who became, finally, "serious Christians." Mather offers this section of the *Magnalia* (entitled "SADDUCISMUS TRIUMPHATUS," or "Sadducism vanquished") as a hortatory against doubt: "Come hither, ye prophane Sadducees, that will not believe the being of a devil, for fear lest you must thence infer the being of a God," he writes; "We will relate some things well known to prudent and honest witnesses: And when you have read this relation, mock on!"[6] In his chapter on the "wonders of the invisible world," Mather carries this notion of Sadducism forward, quoting a preface to a "true" witchcraft narrative which claims that "This great instance [of possession] comes with such convincing evidence, that he must be a very obdurate Sadducee, that will not believe it." Perhaps most importantly, Mather refers to the Salem witchcraft trials as "SADDUCISMUS DEBELLATUS," or "Sadducism stormed," presumably because, after the trials, confessions, convictions, and executions in Salem, one can no longer offer plausible denial of a spiritual world beyond the earthly one.[7] According to Mather and his Puritan contemporaries, in other words, witchcraft "proved" what Ann Kibbey has called the "fact of spiritual intervention in the natural world."[8] Witchcraft, therefore, undermined "Sadducaical" skepticism.

But the connections between Sadducism and witchcraft exceed these theologically instrumental ones, as a look at *how* the Sadducees' denial of resurrection is framed in the New Testament will suggest. Repeated in the books of Luke, Mark, and Matthew, the story of the Sadducees involves a debate with Jesus on the matter of resurrection. Interested in "entangling him in his talk," the Sadducees approach Jesus with an intriguing hypothetical problem. "Now there were seven brothers among us," they begin: "the first married, and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother. So too the second and third, down to the seventh. After them all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, to which of the seven will she be wife? For they all had her."[9] Less interesting for my purposes than Jesus' answer to the Sadducees (he tells them, in essence, that worldly laws do not attend the risen soul, that the very "problem" they pose is moot) is the fact that, as Tamara Harvey has pointed out,

resurrection is here debated via the "vehicle" of "marriage and the possession of women."[10]

That this connection between the "heretical" views of the Sadducees and the idea of secure ownership of women in marriage is not merely incidental to Puritan histories is made clear in the ecclesiastical trial of Anne Hutchinson, whose own denial of resurrection seems to threaten the very institution of marriage itself. Indeed, Harvey comments, "Part of what is at stake in the theological debates of the Antinomian Controversy is the status of women as possessions in marriage."[11] John Cotton makes Hutchinson's challenge to this status explicit, begging her to "consider" that

> *if the Resurection be past than you cannot Evade the Argument* that was prest upon you by *our Brother Buckle* and others, that filthie Sinne of the Comunitie of Woemen and all promiscuus and filthie cominge togeather of men and Woemen without Distinction or Relation of Marriage, will necessarily follow. And though I have not herd, nayther do I thinke, you have bine unfaythfull to your Husband in his Marriage Covenant, *yet that will follow upon it*, for it is the very argument that the Saduces bringe to our Saviour Christ agaynst the Resurrection . . . [12]

Cotton is clearly interested in the issue of doubt here; but at least as important for him are the implications of that doubt for civil authority: without the idea of an extraworldly judgment to follow, what is to hold people (and, in particular, women) to their worldly covenants (and, in particular, the covenant of marriage)? Cotton's specific reference to the debate between Jesus and the Sadducees reveals the secular nature of his concerns: as Harvey observes, whereas Jesus "de-emphasizes the human covenant of marriage" in his answer to the Sadducees, Hutchinson's judges "reemphasize it, shifting attention from the resurrection to worldly morality" and to the threats to that morality that Hutchinson poses.[13] From Hutchinson's "mortalist" rejection of the resurrection of the soul/body, Cotton insists, "will necessarily follow" disruptions in the social—and particularly the marital—body: "that filthie Sinne of the Comunitie of Woemen," the "promiscuus and filthie cominge togeather of men and Woemen without Distinction or Relation of Marriage."[14] Although Cotton indicates his awareness that Hutchinson has not yet been involved in such a "filthie cominge togeather," that she has not literally violated the marriage covenant, she is clearly heading in that direction: inevitably, he proclaims, "*that will follow upon it.*" And all the examiners seem to believe in any case that the marriage covenant has already been *figuratively* violated: "you have stept out of your place," Hugh Peters tells her; "*you have rather bine a Husband than a Wife.*"[15]

Hutchinson's "sadducism" thus comes to be connected to her usurpation of a husband's prerogative in marriage, to her usurpation of male authority over her and her body. Despite Hutchinson's acknowledgement in her civil trial—published in an appendix to Thomas Hutchinson's *History of Massa-*

chuseths Bay, an important source for Hawthorne—that the judges "have power over my body," her position on resurrection implicitly denies the ultimate meaning of that power. Indeed, Hutchinson goes on to deny the magistrates' authority, telling them that only "the Lord Jesus hath power over my body and soul," and noting ominously that "if you go on in this course you begin you will bring a curse upon you and your posterity, and the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."[16]

Considering how her "heresies" are framed in her trials, and considering the sort of "curse" that apparently issued from her, it seems somewhat surprising that Anne Hutchinson was never formally accused of witchcraft. Historian Carol Karlsen has attempted to account for this, noting that, while witchcraft was much prosecuted in seventeenth-century England and was also included in colonial legal codes as a capital crime, the "demographic and economic conditions of early settlement" delayed witchcraft prosecutions in the colonies.[17] But, as Karlsen also points out, many of the stories that circulated about Hutchinson—particularly in the writings of John Winthrop, with which Hawthorne was thoroughly familiar—draw on long-held associations with and images of witchcraft. Carrying with them beliefs originating in their native England, most colonists, Karlsen suggests, would have associated witches with a variety of "sins," including "discontent, anger, envy, malice, seduction, lying, and pride."[18] Hutchinson was, of course, accused of all of these (seduction is perhaps most interesting in this regard, carrying us back to Cotton's jeremiad regarding the "promiscuus and filthie cominge togeather of men and Woemen" that Hutchinson's views allegedly promoted). Winthrop's *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists, and Libertines* recounts, for example, Hutchinson's response to a visit made to her after her banishment by "foure . . . members" of the Church of Boston. In his retelling, Winthrop stresses the "disdain" (read "pride") and "bitterness" of "spirit" (read "discontent, anger, envy, malice") with which Hutchinson greets her visitors, along with her defiant rejection of their spiritual authority: "What, from the Church at Boston? I know no such Church, neither will I owne it, call it the Whore and Strumpet of Boston, no Church of Christ," she allegedly declares.[19]

Drawing on Hutchinson's deviance from accepted (female) norms—her bitterness, her pride, her unruly speech—Winthrop places Hutchinson in a field of associations that renders her analogous, if not identical, to the colonial witch. This field is even more spectacularly elaborated in the famous and oft-repeated description of Hutchinson's "monstrous birth."[20] Like Mary Dyer, one of Hutchinson's followers and loyal supporters whose own "monstrous birth" testifies to the monstrosity of her theological positions, Hutchinson is depicted as delivering a kind of demon offspring.[21] Indeed, according to Winthrop, Hutchinson "brought forth not one, (as Mistris Dier did) but . . . 30 monstrous births or thereabouts, at once; some of them bigger, some lesser, some of one shape, some of another; few of any perfect shape, none at all of them . . . of humane shape."[22] Winthrop insists, of course, that in these

"demon offspring" one can see the hand of God, who has been "pleased to step in with his casting voice, and bring in his owne vote and suffrage from heaven, by testifying his displeasure against their opinions and practises, as clearely as if he had pointed with his finger."[23]

As if to reassert the corporeal power that Hutchinson had earlier granted and then promptly denied him, Winthrop clearly works to exercise interpretive authority over Hutchinson's body. In her discussion of Hutchinson's "mortalist" views, Tamara Harvey explains that "Hutchinson and her followers . . . reject the significance of the body except as a vehicle for immediate union with Christ, and in doing so undermine the system that authorized the judges and sustains patriarchal privilege."[24] In his description of the "monstrous birth," we witness Winthrop reinstating the very "system" that Hutchinson undermines: he insists precisely on the significance of her body—a body the offspring of which marks Hutchinson's seduction by the devil—in order to show that God's judgment is consonant with that of the magistrates, whose theological and social authority is thereby underscored. Hutchinson is, in short, as much marked by Satan as are the colonial witches whose bodies would later be "searched" for devils' "teats" or who "gave birth to and suckled demons instead of children."[25] And ultimately, her "witchcraft" can be traced back to her Sadducaical "heresies"—those heresies that "necessarily" lead to the disruption of the "proper" and accepted relations between men and women, husbands and wives, that was so widely feared by Puritan authorities.

I would suggest that this same set of associations is at work in the *Magnalia Christi Americana*, when Mather makes his even more direct links between Sadducism and witchcraft. Like Winthrop during the Antinomian Crisis, Mather is as interested in the temporal disturbances the witchcraft outbreaks map as he is in their theological implications. Offering himself as witness to one family's victimization at the hands of a witch, for example, Mather explains that he brought the family's oldest daughter into his own home, "partly out of compassion to her parents, but chiefly that I might be a critical eye-witness to things that would enable me to confute the sadducism of this debauch'd age."[26] Here, the "debauchery" seems at least in part to refer to the worldly sins into which Mather believed that later generations of colonists had descended. He can "confute . . . sadducism" not only by bearing witness to the "truth" of spiritual life, but also by showing just how strongly implicated the "devil" had become in the daily ("debauch'd") lives of the colonists.

Whatever specific sins and debaucheries Mather had in mind, it is worth taking note of the historical commonplace that the vast majority of those accused, prosecuted, and executed for witchcraft in the colonies were women. In recent years, historians have turned increasingly to the economic disputes that lie at the root of witchcraft outbreaks. Perhaps most famously, Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum have argued that the Salem outbreak of 1692 was fuelled by conflict between an emergent mercantile class and a group tied to a traditional, land-based economic order.[27] But, as Carol Karlsen asserts, while this move to identify the central role that economic considerations played in

accusations of and prosecutions for witchcraft is crucial, Boyer and Nissenbaum do not "tell[ ] us very much about why witches were primarily women."[28] Karlsen attempts to fill in this gap: carrying forward the correlation that Boyer and Nissenbaum find between witchcraft outbreaks and wide-spread anxieties over changing economic (and therefore social) relations, Karlsen argues persuasively that women came to stand in for and in fact to provoke such anxiety. In particular, she notes, "Whether as actual or potential inheritors of property, as healers or tavern-keepers or merchants, most accused witches were women who symbolized the obstacles to [male ownership] of property and [male] prosperity." "[A]ll witches," Karlsen asserts, "stood symbolically opposed to—and therefore were subversive of—that order, in that they did not accept their assigned place within it."[29] David D. Hall makes a similar claim, noting that "[t]he prosecution of women as witches occurred in a society in which men exercised substantial authority—legal, political, ideological, and economic—over women. It is possible to interpret witch-hunting as a means of reaffirming this authority at a time when some women (like the charismatic spiritual leader Anne Hutchinson) were testing these constraints, and when others were experiencing a degree of independence, as when women without husbands or male siblings inherited property."[30]

Here, then, one might bring another perspective to bear on the analogy between the Sadducees, women, and witchcraft made by both Winthrop and Mather. Like the Sadducees, whose denial of resurrection appeared to the Puritans to open the door to a denial of the covenant of marriage, the witch also threatened that covenant (hence witches were often accused of promiscuity, sexual laxity, and adultery). Further, the witch also threatened the ownership of property by men (whether of the woman or of her land and personalty) which that covenant was intended to ensure. In this context, it makes sense that much of the "evidence" lodged against accused witches involved *maleficia*—evil deeds or mischief—allegedly performed against personal and real property: cows and chickens inexplicably become sick, household objects and farming equipment go missing or get damaged, crops are destroyed.

The case of accused witch Katherine Harrison offers insight into the role women's claims to property might have played in witchcraft accusations and prosecution. Harrison was a widow whose husband left her the bulk of his large estate—789 pounds; the remainder of the 929-pound estate went to his three daughters at his death in 1666, making her at once very wealthy and in control of a good deal of real and personal property. Significantly, it was after her husband's death, between 1668 and 1670, that Harrison was accused of and tried for witchcraft multiple times, and convicted at least once.[31] Testimony against Harrison indicates the usual accusations of unruly speech, threatening behavior, and *maleficia* against people and property. But records also reveal the extent to which Harrison recognized that the accusations signaled a battle for, and the extent to which she was determined to preserve, her property. In 1668, around the time of her first witchcraft accusation, Harrison presented a formal petition of grievances in court, accusing her neighbors of

vandalism and attacks on her estate. Among other complaints, she testifies that many of her horses, sows, cows and oxen have been "spoiled," their backs or ribs broken, "hole[s] bored" in their sides or "legs cut off"; that her corn was "damnified with horses" and that "30 poles of hops [were] cut and spoiled." Perhaps most interestingly, Harrison observes that her very marks of ownership have been effaced and re-written: "I had a heifer in my barnyard," she testifies, "my earmark of which was cut out, and other earmarks set on; nextly I had a sow that had young pigs earmarked (in the sty) after the same manner." Taking note of the specific timing at work in this worldly *maleficia*—"all which things have happened since my husband['s] death," she writes—Harrison seems to have been well-aware of the threat she posed as a *feme sole* property owner.[32] Not surprisingly, among her earliest accusers was one John Chester, with whom Harrison was involved in a land dispute.[33]

Katherine Harrison was not the first wealthy widow to be accused of and indicted for witchcraft. A few years earlier, in fact, a more widely-known widow—one who makes repeated appearances in *The Scarlet Letter* itself—was not only tried and convicted, but also executed as a witch. In 1656, Anne Hibbins was sentenced by the General Court of Massachusetts to "hang till she was dead."[34] Hibbins serves as another salient example of the link between women, property ownership, and witchcraft. Her case also reminds us of the ways in which the marriage covenant operated to contain the threat to male ownership of property posed by strong women. In 1640, long before she was formally convicted of witchcraft, Hibbins was brought to trial for "false accusations and contentious behavior," after having publicly aired complaints about the quality and cost of work done by a joiner in her house.[35] While much of her church trial concerns the extent to which her "censurings, and judgings" of her "brethren" were "uncharitable," of even greater concern appears to be the extent to which Anne Hibbins' accusations against the joiner involved her usurpation of husbandly authority. In her "examination," one "Sargent Savage" notes that "if all other offenses were passed by, . . . yet she hath shed forth one sin in the face of the congregation worthy of reproof: and that is transgressing the rule of the apostle in usurping authority over him whom God hath made her head and husband, and in taking the power and authority . . . out of his hands; and when he was satisfied and sits down contented she . . . will stir in it, as if she were able to manage it better than her husband, which is a plain breach of the rule of Christ."[36]

By taking up a cause her husband had been willing to lay aside, Hibbins appears to have nullified his authority; in doing so, or so the complaints suggest, she seems to have nullified *him*. Under the (common law) principles of coverture in operation in virtually all of the New England colonies at this time, the married woman lost any agency she might have possessed as a *feme sole* to her husband. As legal commentator William Blackstone would later explain it, "the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband."[37] Complaints against Hibbins indicate a perception that she has

(sinfully) violated and inverted these principles: "some do think she doth but make a wisp of her husband" one examiner acknowledges; another complains, "she makes a cipher of her husband."[38] By coming out from under her husband's "cover," Hibbins has apparently rendered *him* meaningless.

For such threats to her husband's very meaning and identity, Hibbins is severely punished: she is first formally admonished, then excommunicated. But these attempts to contain the threats Hibbins posed to male meaning were themselves nullified by Hibbins' widowhood in 1654. Threatening enough as a married woman who exerts control of her husband's property, Hibbins would appear to have been even more threatening as a *feme sole*. Much like Katherine Harrison, Hibbins was left a substantial property-owner upon her husband's death. Again like Harrison, just two years after being widowed, Hibbins was tried as a witch. In Hibbins' case, however, the results of the trial were far more dire. She was executed in June of 1656.

Anne Hibbins is, of course, the only explicitly identified witch in *The Scarlet Letter*. Consideration of her case therefore invites us back into Hawthorne's text and its treatment of the threat one individual woman poses to the covenant of marriage and (male) property ownership. In recent years, critics such as Carol Bensick, Gordon Hutner, and Ken Egan have turned to the question of Hawthorne's complex and revisionary representation of adultery in *The Scarlet Letter*.[39] The issues of property and possession at work in Hester's adulterous act, however, have received less attention. Perhaps because the text itself displaces the issue of cuckoldry onto issues of sin, penitence, and redemption, it is tempting *not* to consider that what Hester has done is, in essence, to give herself to another—to exert a kind of agency and self-proprietorship that the laws of marriage simply do not grant her. Gillian Brown, who sees issues of inheritance and women's property at the center of Hawthorne's novel, suggests that this displacement emerges from the novel itself, which effectively "erases" the issue of adultery in order to "make property safely heritable" for Pearl. Thus, Brown claims, "the original crime, the usurpation of Chillingworth's marital property in Hester's person, has practically disappeared even at the outset of the story."[40] I submit, however, that this "crime" does not "disappear," for both Hawthorne's seventeenth-century sources and his own society, occupied itself with debates about marital property law, continue to insist on it. Like Anne Hibbins and Anne Hutchinson, the "witches" with whom she is associated throughout the novel, Hester's violation of the marriage covenant—in her case a violation that is quite literal—sets in motion troubling questions of male authority over property. The question to which *The Scarlet Letter* finally points, then, is this: who can claim ownership of Hester?

Just as she is with Anne Hutchinson, Hester is associated with Anne Hibbins from the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter*, when the narrator sets the stage for Hester's emergence from the Boston jail. Noting the possible reasons for the gathering of a "pretty large number of the inhabitants of Boston"

before the prison-door—perhaps an Antinomian or a Quaker is to be "scourged out of the town," or "an idle and vagrant Indian" whipped "into the shadow of the forest"—the narrator moves to the scenario that will prove most appropriate to Hester's own: "It might be, too, that a witch, like old Mistress Hibbins, the bitter-tempered widow of the magistrate, was to die upon the gallows" (47). Scott Harshbarger has noticed the lack of critical commentary on "Hawthorne's characterization, and condemnation, of Hibbins as a full-fledged witch." While one might "reasonably expect" Hawthorne to "exonerate Hibbins from charges of witchcraft" in a novel "dedicated to expiating the sins of Hawthorne's persecuting forebears," Harshbarger writes, "the author heads in the opposite direction," so that by the end of the novel "Hibbins emerges as self-confessed disciple" of Satan.[41] In short, Hawthorne seems notably uncritical of his Puritan sources in this case, drawing on such representations of Hibbins as that offered by Thomas Hutchinson, who takes pains in his 1765 *History of Massachusetts Bay* to describe the "natural crabbedness" of Hibbins' character, along with the "turbulent and quarrelsome" nature that "brought her under church censures, and at length rendered her so odious to her neighbours as to cause some of them to accuse her of witchcraft," and who questions the validity of neither her condemnation nor her execution.[42]

Hibbins always appears in *The Scarlet Letter* at the moments of greatest vulnerability for the protagonists: she is rumored to have approached Hester upon her departure from Governor Bellingham's mansion, where Hester has gone to appeal for permission to keep Pearl (103); she "is said to have" confronted Dimmesdale upon his reentrance into the village from the forest, where he has sealed a pact to leave the colony with Hester (192). In these contexts, Hibbins seems to be used as a marker for what Harshbarger calls the main characters' "proximity" to "radical evil."[43] It is thereby significant, of course, that Hester repeatedly resists Hibbins' invitations into the forest: "'Make my excuse to [the Black Man],'" Hester says "with a triumphant smile. 'I must tarry at home, and keep watch over my little Pearl. Had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone with thee into the forest, and signed my name in the Black Man's book too'" (103). Hester may be proximate to, but she has not apparently crossed over into, the "evil" that Hibbins represents.

Hester's resistance to Hibbins is figured in terms of her commitment to her daughter, to her status as mother. But while Hester remains true to her domesticity, however painful and problematic that domesticity is for her, we know that she has once, and irrevocably, transgressed the legal bounds of domestic relations. Hester has, to use the phrase deployed by John Cotton in Anne Hutchinson's trial, "bine unfaythfull to [her] Husband in his Marriage Covenant"; and it is this violation to which Hester refers when she confesses to Pearl that "Once in my life I met the Black Man" (162). By figuring her adultery as a mark of having compacted with the Devil, Hester connects herself to both Hutchinson and Hibbins, who violated the marriage covenant by usurping their husbands' proprietorship in their persons. Like both of these precursors, Hester claims an authority over "personal" property —in this case,

her property in herself—that transgresses the very principal of marital unity upon which colonial marriage and its attendant property laws were based.

Chillingworth tacitly admits as much in a scene that offers a series of complicated witchcraft/marriage/property associations. In his first face-to-face confrontation with Hester, Chillingworth reveals through his language just how central the issue of ownership is to the complex of relations between the three protagonists. Like an accused witch pressured to name her "confederates," Hester is queried by Chillingworth: "the man lives who has wronged us both! Who is he?" (69). Hester's refusal to name her confederate proves to Chillingworth, as Carol Bensick asserts, that "she will not be reunited with him on any terms."[44] The "unity" between husband and wife has been irrevocably violated: Hester has come out permanently from under Chillingworth's "cover."

Having been thus forced to relinquish property in Hester, Chillingworth (in three variations) claims ownership of the yet-undiscovered lover: "he must needs be mine!," "he is mine," and "he shall be mine!," he announces with a "look of confidence" perhaps belied by his rather anxious repetitions of the phrase (69). Chillingworth's interest in reestablishing himself as a secure proprietor is borne out again later in the same scene, when he goes from overtly divesting himself of ownership of Hester ("thou that wast my wife," he proclaims her [69]) to reclaiming property in her that, under common law, vests in him as husband. Drawing on principles of marital unity, according to which a wife could not testify against her husband because she would thereby incriminate herself,[45] he enjoins her to silence about his true identity, reminding her as he does so that "Thou and thine, Hester Prynne, belong to me" (70).

The narrative sympathies in this scene are complicated.[46] Having made her promise, Hester queries Chillingworth as to whether she has made another demonic compact: "Art thou like the Black Man, that haunts the forest round about us? Hast thou enticed me into a bond that will prove the ruin of my soul?" (70). At this moment, of course, it is not Hester but Chillingworth who is associated with witchcraft.[47] Here, the legal "bond" of marriage, under the principles of which Hester "belongs" to Chillingworth and so cannot bear witness against him, draws Hester into a clear moral violation. By returning to her role as *feme covert*, Hester betrays Dimmesdale, who remains ignorant of Chillingworth's true identity. The narrative thus seems to critique legal marriage as an institution which, by denying Hester proprietorship of herself, draws her into a bond with the "Black Man" who seeks to claim her.[48]

But at the same time, as readers and critics have long recognized, *The Scarlet Letter* remains deeply ambivalent about Hester's resistance to the secular laws of men and marriage, as much repelled as compelled by the various forms of insurgency that she represents. Like Anne Hutchinson, who believed, as she made clear in her civil trial, that the magistrates owned her body but not her "body and soul," Hester has, in exerting her own (sexual and social) agency, laid claim to radical properties in herself. But try as Hawthorne might to ratify those claims, the narrative he creates argues against him, associating Hester's

freedom of thought both with a kind of unsexing (she has lost "[s]ome attribute . . . the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman" [143]) and with the capital crime of witchcraft. Having announced that "the world's law was no law for [Hester's] mind," the narrator points out that "our forefathers" would have "held [her freedom of speculation] to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter" (143).

It is significant that, just after we get "another view" (178) of Hester's fully anarchic tendencies, we watch her break her promise of (wifely) silence to Chillingworth, confess her sin of silence to Dimmesdale, and then propose a new life elsewhere for her, Dimmesdale, and Pearl. And it is just after Dimmesdale agrees to flee with Hester that Anne Hibbins makes a brief but potent reappearance in the text, meeting Dimmesdale on his return to Boston from his walk with Hester. "So, reverend Sir, you have made a visit into the forest," the "witch-lady" remarks, drawing Dimmesdale into the witchcraft associations with which the text is replete (193).

A curious detail in this scene, however, reminds us that it is not Dimmesdale but Hester who has initiated the new transgression. Hibbins, we are told, "made a very grand appearance; having on a high head-dress, a rich gown of velvet, and a ruff done up with the famous yellow starch, of which Ann Turner, her especial friend, had taught her the secret, before this last good lady had been hanged for Sir Thomas Overbury's murder" (193). With the reference to Anne Turner, who, in addition to being convicted of murder, was also accused of being "a witch, a trafficker in necromancy," and a "sorceress," the issue of witchcraft reverts back to Hester herself.[49] Turner's "yellow ruff," for example, is linked not just to Hibbins but also to Hester, whose needlework resembles Turner's own: according to Alfred Reid, Turner "made ruffs and cuffs and introduced fashions of dress into courtly circles. The starched yellow ruff is said to have been her invention."[50] It should come as no surprise, then, that in addition to being a witch, Turner was also an adulteress. Hawthorne may have earlier drawn a distinction between Hester and Hibbins, but that distinction breaks down here as, *via* Anne Turner, the relationship between witchcraft and marital "violation" returns with a subtle but insistent force. Indeed, in a final marketplace scene that loops us back to the opening of the text, we see Hibbins, wearing in this case a "triple ruff," in direct "conjunction with Hester Prynne" (209). Clearly, the narrative cannot let Hester's "witchcraft" go. Finally, Hawthorne seems unable to do other than concur with his forefathers, the judging "iron men" for whom a woman's resistance—Hutchinson's, Hibbens', Hester's—to the laws of patriarchal marriage was viewed as a "deadly" crime indeed.[51]

Why is it, then, that Hawthorne's text cannot finally break free from those patriarchal, persecuting ancestors—the very forefathers against whom he sets himself in "The Custom-House"? Referring to some literary forefathers in his analysis of Hawthorne's use of Anne Hutchinson, Michael Colacurcio provides a possible answer, one that moves away from the situation of marriage and toward matters of the literary market. Noting the ways in which Cotton

Mather's depictions of Hutchinson emerge from those of John Winthrop, Colacurcio writes, "The basic antifeminist construction seems to originate with Winthrop—not only with his specific characterization of Mrs. Hutchinson as 'a woman of a haughty and fierce carriage, of a nimble wit and active spirit, and a very voluble tongue' but also with the clear implication in his whole account that one very deep issue is Mrs. Hutchinson's female invasion of male 'literary' prerogative."[52] Hawthorne's familiarity with this perception of Hutchinson (which draws not only on the "teaching" function she exerted in the Puritan community, but also on her resistant readings of scripture) is made plain in his 1830 sketch, "Mrs. Hutchinson," which begins with a prefatory meditation on the "portentous" rise of literary women. "[T]here are obvious circumstances which will render female pens more numerous and more prolific than those of men," Hawthorne writes; soon, he goes on, "the ink-stained Amazons will expel their rivals by actual pressure, and petticoats wave triumphant over all the field."[53]

Hawthorne's use of the battle metaphor lends credence to a remark made many years later by one of those "ink-stained Amazons," Elizabeth Stoddard. Writing to Rufus Griswold in 1856, Stoddard described her authorship in terms of "guerrilla . . . warfare," noting that "The Literary Female is abroad and the souls of the literary men are tried."[54] Coupled with Hawthorne's earlier rendition, Stoddard's depiction of the "warfare" between literary women and literary men facilitates the now-familiar reading of what, precisely, is at issue in the contest: the battlefield is the literary marketplace, and the clear victor, by 1850, is the "Literary Female," whose prominence and salability far exceeds that of the sorely tried "Literary Male." This is, of course, the war for readers that led Hawthorne to make his infamous complaint to William D. Ticknor, quoted *ad infinitum*, about the "mob of scribbling women" and the "trash" they "sell by the 100,000."[55]

Certainly one can see the ways in which Hawthorne's uneasiness with Hester's power—a power notably figured, via references to Hester's needlework, as in part artistic—reflects anxieties about an ongoing literary battle in which men appeared (in Hawthorne's own moment, in any case) to be the losers. But while admitting the significance of these issues, I want also to read the matter much less metaphorically, to revert the discussion back to the literal problem being negotiated in *The Scarlet Letter* and its sources: men's property in women. I have already suggested how witchcraft trials in general, and the trial of Anne Hibbins in particular, manifested concerns about the "witch's" violation of principles of coverture, according to which the married woman's existence is "incorporated" into that of her husband. The issue of coverture, I have also noted, had resurfaced as the focus of one of many "reform" movements in the antebellum period. Emerging in the wake of the Panic of 1837, which prompted concerns about how to protect men's property from creditors, and fuelled by both legal codification movements and woman's rights agitation, the effort to modify the laws governing women's rights to property in marriage intensified in the years just prior to *The Scarlet Letter*'s

publication. Debates about laws took place not only in the more rarified forums of the "Woman's Rights Convention," but also in mainstream publications like *Godey's Ladies Book* and "high culture" magazines like *U. S. Magazine and Democratic Review*.

In this context, we should not find it remarkable that Hawthorne engages matters of property and marriage in *The Scarlet Letter*. But to understand the urgency—the anxiety—with which those matters are treated, we have to recognize that coverture designates not just the distribution of property in marriage, but the distribution of subjectivity as well. Legal historian Margaret Radin has noted that, according to one "strand" of liberal property theory (a strand clearly applicable to the U.S. context), to "achieve proper self-development—to be a *person*—an individual needs some control" over property.[56] According to this theory, one is literally constituted by the property to which one lays claim. To the "personality" thus constructed C. B. Macpherson has offered the now-famous designation, "possessive individual." Property, according to the theory of possessive individualism, is not merely something the individual has the right to claim; it is something the individual must claim, in order to *be* an individual: "the man without property in things loses that full proprietorship of his own person," Macpherson explains.[57] Insofar as they ratify men's control both over any real and personal property a woman might have controlled before marriage and, importantly, over the woman herself, laws of coverture operate in a quite obvious way to underwrite the possessive individual (whose gendered contours are thereby made plain). By codifying women's object-status, marital laws attempted to make "one plus one equal one."[58] That final "one" is the possessive individual, the liberal subject whose ownership in "things"—in this case, a wife—ratifies his "proprietorship in his own person." It is precisely this proprietorship, this distinctive form of self-possession, which the wife threatens when she refuses to exist under the cover of male control. It is no wonder that we find one of Anne Hibbins' examiners fretfully protesting that she "makes a cipher of her husband."

Given the high stakes of this proprietary contest, it becomes less remarkable that *The Scarlet Letter*, like its colonial sources, figures woman's effort to exert more control over herself and her property in terms of witchcraft. Indeed, Hawthorne would not have been alone in making the association. In the aftermath of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, which highlighted laws of coverture in its manifesto, *The Declaration of Sentiments*, one commentator remarked that a "new element" (women's activism) had been "thrown into the cauldron of agitation which is now bubbling around us with such fury."[59] In even more hysterical rhetoric, assemblyman Jonathan Burnet responded to an 1854 speech to the New York legislature by Elizabeth Cady Stanton—a speech in which Stanton argued for changes in New York's property laws—by proclaiming that Stanton and her cohorts "do not appear to be satisfied with having unsexed themselves, but they desire to unsex every female in the land, and to set the whole community ablaze with unhallowed fire." "[I]t is well known," Burnet went on, "that the object of these unsexed women is to

overthrow the most sacred of our institutions, to set at defiance the Divine law which declares man and wife to be one, and establish on its ruins what will be in fact and in principle but a species of legalized adultery."[60]

Hawthorne's treatment of Hester's marital insurgency is, of course, a great deal more tempered than this. But the text's inability to fully ratify that insurgency suggests that Hawthorne is perhaps no less anxious than assemblyman Burnet about its consequences. That anxiety is put on display even more obviously in *The Scarlet Letter*'s pre-text, "The Custom-House," which is, as I noted at the outset of this essay, riddled with metaphors of witchcraft and (male dis-)possession. We are now, I think, in a better position to understand these metaphors, and to recognize the ways in which that text, along with the narrative that follows it, might function as an effort to beat back the very forces that threaten to "possess" the writer by challenging his subjective mastery. For having begun "The Custom-House" with an assertion regarding his own passive experience of dispossession (the writer has been "taken possession of" by an "autobiographical impulse"), Hawthorne ends with an assertion of his own proprietorship over the materials of his narrative. This assertion begins early in "The Custom-House," when Hawthorne argues for the "propriety" of his sketch by alleging that it "explain[s] how a large portion of the following pages came into my possession" (8). Following this lead, he moves in the sketch from viewing himself as one who has lost subjective mastery to constructing himself as a proprietor of certain self-constituting materials. Having claimed those materials he can, by the end of his introductory sketch, declare himself a self-owning "citizen of somewhere else" (43): Hawthorne has liberated himself from the Custom-House, from imaginative imprisonment, from Salem, and, most importantly, from the condition of subjective alienation and dispossession that he finds so troubling.

But while Hawthorne seeks to assert, by the end of his introductory sketch, such liberation, the narrative that follows, as we have already seen, reverberates against and unsettles this claim. In recent years, we have increasingly explored how Hawthorne might be less the slayer of middle-class ideology than he is a sometimes reluctant, sometimes enthusiastic participant in it. The discomfort about female (self)ownership registered throughout *The Scarlet Letter* in its associations between Hester, Hutchinson, and Hibbins exposes another layer of that participation. Despite his effort to situate himself in an alternative and indeed antipatriarchal history, *The Scarlet Letter* taken as a whole suggests that, like Winthrop and Mather before him, and like his own middle-class culture, Hawthorne needs the possessed female body. For it would appear that only through that body can doubts about male subjective mastery—fears about becoming, like Anne Hibbins' husband, a "wisp" and a "cipher"—be contained and controlled.

Notes

[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter: A Romance* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 7. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

[2] See Samuel Chase Coale, *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American Romance* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1998); Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies in Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978); Millicent Bell, *Hawthorne's View of the Artist* (New York: State Univ. Press, 1962). For an alternative reading, briefly articulated, see Mary E. Rucker, "The Art of Witchcraft in Hawthorne's 'Feathertop: A Moralized Legend,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 24 (1987), 31–39. The phrase "popular supernaturalism" comes from Howard Kerr, John W. Crowley, and Charles L. Crow, "Introduction," *The Haunted Dusk: American Supernatural Fiction, 1820–1920* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1983), 4.

[3] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Letters, 1843–1853*, ed. Thomas Woodson, L. Neal Smith, and Norman Holmes Pearson, *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Vol. 16 (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1985), 329–30.

[4] Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986), 140.

[5] I am indebted to my colleague, Tamara Harvey, for the insight into the role of Sadducism in these contexts and its pertinence to *The Scarlet Letter*.

[6] Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England* (Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1853), Vol. 2, 445.

[7] Mather, 465, 471.

[8] Ann Kibbey, "Mutations of the Supernatural: Witchcraft, Remarkable Providences, and the Power of Puritan Men," *American Quarterly* 34 (1982), 137. Kibbey's essay offers a fascinating reading of the complications posed for Puritan authorities by the fact that "the image of the deity as the author of remarkable providences, and the image of the witch as the author of *maleficia* [evil deeds or mischief] were positive and negative forms of a single idea about supernatural power" (137). Kibbey notes in particular that both "forms" of such power were associated with men, thereby working against a traditional reading that associates witchcraft largely with women. Indeed, Kibbey asks, "since Puritan culture so strongly associated the power of *maleficia* with adult males, we need to ask seriously why and how were women accused of witchcraft at Salem at all?" (147). The answer, she suggests, lies at least in part in the effort by men to criminalize women's efforts to "take for themselves a power that Puritan culture had come to associate with adult male sexual identity" (149).

[9] *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 1201.

[10] Tamara Harvey, *Modesty's Charge: The Body and Feminist Tactics in Early American Women's Discourse* (Diss. University of California, 1998), 128.

[11] Harvey, 128–29.

[12] David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1990), 372.

[13] Harvey, 128.

[14] It is precisely such a "cominge togeather of men and Woemen without Distinction or Relation of Marriage" in which Hester and Dimmesdale participate in *The Scarlet Letter*. I do not intend to read Hawthorne's text as an allegory of the Antinomian Crisis, or even to parse out detail by detail the much-discussed relationship between the historical Anne Hutchinson and the fictional Hester Prynne. Rather, I am interested more generally in the ways in which Hawthorne's Puritan sources lead to an almost inevitable association between strong (read "heretical") women and the violation of patriarchal principles of (male) ownership. The most fully enacted reading of the relationship between Hutchinson and Hester Prynne is still Michael Colacurcio's "Footsteps of Ann Hutchinson: The Context of *The Scarlet Letter*," *ELH* 39 (1972), 459–94. Also see Amy Schrager Lang, *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987).

[15] Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy*, 382–83.

[16] Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy*, 338.

[17] Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 14. The first witchcraft prosecution occurred in Connecticut in 1647.

[18] Karlsen, 119.

[19] Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy*, 215.

[20] That Hawthorne was aware of these descriptions and that they come to him from Winthrop's *A Short Story* seem clear from his 1830 sketch, "Mrs. Hutchinson," where he notes that "Governor Winthrop does not disdain to record a notable instance, very interesting in a scientific point of view, but fitter for his old and homely narrative than for modern repetition." See "Mrs. Hutchinson," in *Tales and Sketches*, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 23. The story of the "monstrous birth" is repeated in Mather's *Magnalia*, which may also have functioned as the source for Hawthorne's reference.

[21] Gabriele Schwab suggests that it was Mary Dyer who just before her execution pronounces the "curse on the Salem judges and their descendants to which Nathaniel Hawthorne refers" in "The Custom-House." See "Seduced by Witches: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* in the Context of New England Witchcraft Fictions,"

in *Seduction and Theory: Readings of Gender, Representation, and Rhetoric*, ed. Dianne Hunter (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1989), 177. For the reference in "The Custom-House," see 12–13.

[22] For a contemporary diagnosis of Hutchinson's miscarriage, see Emery Battis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson in the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1962), 247–48, 346–48; and Bethany Reid, "'Unfit for Light': Anne Bradstreet's Monstrous Birth," *New England Quarterly* 71 (1998), 517–42.

[23] Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy*, 214.

[24] Harvey, 129.

[25] Karlsen, 144. Karlsen also notes that, like witches, Hutchinson was depicted as "dispens[ing]" theological "poisons" (144) throughout the Puritan community.

[26] Mather, 460.

[27] Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974).

[28] Karlsen, 214.

[29] Karlsen, 217.

[30] David D. Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History* (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1991), 7. Also see Kibbey, 147–49.

[31] Both Carol Karlsen and David Hall take up Harrison's case. See Karlsen, 84–89; and Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, 170–84.

[32] All quotations regarding Harrison's case come from Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, 171–72.

[33] According to both Karlsen and Hall, Harrison kept working to find ways to render her estate less vulnerable and to protect it for her daughters. Although she seems to have held on to some of her real property, she had in 1668 signed much of her estate over to her daughters and by 1669 "disposed of a great part of her estate to others in trust" (quoted in Karlsen, 88).

[34] Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, 90.

[35] Nancy F. Cott, *The Root of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women* (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1986), 47.

[36] Cott, 56, 48.

[37] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Vol. 1, ed. Stanley N. Katz (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), 430.

[38] Cott, 48, 54.

[39] See Carol Bensick, "His Folly, Her Weakness: Demystified Adultery in *The Scarlet Letter*," *New Essays on The Scarlet Letter*, ed. Michael J. Colacurcio (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 137–59. Bensick offers the most thorough reading of Hawthorne's novel within the "novel of adultery" tradition, suggesting persuasively that under Hawthorne's treatment adultery becomes not "a fateful tragedy to be ritually suffered," but rather "a practical human problem that the individuals involved have, along with their society, a common obligation to address" (137). Also see Gordon Hutner, *Secrets and Sympathy: Forms of Disclosure in Hawthorne's Novels* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1988); and Ken Egan, "The Adulteress in the Marketplace: Hawthorne and *The Scarlet Letter*," *Studies in the Novel* 27 (1995), 26–41.

[40] Gillian Brown, "Hawthorne, Inheritance, and Women's Property," *Studies in the Novel* 23 (1991), 110, 113. Brown argues that Hawthorne works to "purify" property by vesting it in women—in this case, Pearl: "Though set in the seventeenth-century, the story of Hester and her daughter registers in its redemptive vision of the sin of adultery a liberalization of nineteenth-century American moral and economic conventions of property and family" (111). Although Brown recognizes the problematic place that Hester assumes in such "redemption," I would argue that Hester's displacement from the "inheritance plot" suggests a more thorough-going ambivalence on Hawthorne's part about women and property ownership.

[41] Scott Harshbarger, "'A H—LL—Fired Story': Hawthorne's Rhetoric of Rumor," *College English* 56 (1994), 32, 39.

[42] Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay* (London: 1765–68), Vol. 2, 173.

[43] Harshbarger, 39.

[44] Bensick, 144.

[45] See Blackstone, 431.

[46] For a thoughtful reading of the ways in which the narrator extends a kind of sympathy and understanding to Chillingworth here, see Bensick, 141–46.

[47] Along with Hester and Chillingworth, Pearl is also represented as a witch in *The Scarlet Letter*. I am less interested in understanding the larger "witchcraft themes" than I am in thinking through the particular field of witchcraft associations with which Hester and her marital insurgency can be located. For a basic overview of the theme of witchcraft in *The Scarlet Letter*, see Claudia Durst Johnson, *Understanding* The Scarlet Letter*: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995).

[48] T. Walter Herbert suggests that Hawthorne draws on emergent ideas about companionate marriage in order to make a distinction between "legal" and "moral" marriage. According to this model, Hester's legal marriage to Chillingworth is itself a kind of adultery. In *The Scarlet Letter*, "the anguish of the principal characters results from

the inopportune social arrangements in which they are fated to live." See Herbert, *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-Class Family* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), 184 and following.

[49] Alfred S. Reid, *The Yellow Ruff and* The Scarlet Letter*: A Source of Hawthorne's Novel* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1955), 3. Noting that Turner "was executed . . . for magic and witchcraft as much as for procuring poisons in the murder of Overbury" (4), Reid takes up at length the connections between Turner and Hester Prynne, and teases out a variety of other connections between the Overbury case and *The Scarlet Letter.*

[50] Reid, 49.

[51] In contrast to this reading, Schwab makes a strong distinction between Hawthorne's moralizing narrator and Hawthorne himself, suggesting that the "attributes condemned by the narrator" are "precisely" those that "make for the strength of Hester as a literary character" and arguing that Hester breaks free from the "witch stereotype" (189).

[52] Colacurcio, 477.

[53] Hawthorne, "Mrs. Hutchinson," 18.

[54] James H. Matlack, "The *Alta-California*'s Lady Correspondent," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 58 (1974), 281–303.

[55] Hawthorne, *The Letters, 1853–1856*, 303.

[56] Margaret Jane Radin, *Reinterpreting Property* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 35.

[57] C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), 231.

[58] Norma Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage, and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), 17.

[59] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, Volume 1: 1848–1861 (New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969), 805.

[60] Stanton, 613.