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Corporeal Crisis and the Contested Female Terrain: An Ecofeminist Reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark"

By Ahmad Qabaha¹

Abstract

This paper originally and substantially studies Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark" from an ecofeminist perspective, while exploring the interconnections and interdependency between the systematic and institutional ways in which the woman and nature were dominated by male-centred society in 19th century society. It explores the ways in which this interconnection mirrors the hegemonic and repressive structure of 19th century patriarchal Victorian culture, paying particular attention to the oppressive mechanisms operating on feminine human and non-human beings. More importantly, this article accounts for the story's critique of the multifaceted domination of nature and female terrain. This article builds on significant contributions to ecofeminist theory while arguing that the oppression of women and exploitation of nature by patriarchal culture and male-run institutions are represented in "The Birth-Mark" as a product of masculinist, colonialist and capitalist assumptions and practices. This article demonstrates that patriarchal culture's unjust hierarchies and systems of domination are connected conceptually, and the promise of Aylmer to relieve Georgina from the corporeal crisis is an instance of difference-and-hierarchy-based domination; it aims at perpetuating the accepted authority and power of man who can contest God's female terrain, and claim his ability to recreate and reintegrate it in ways that show absolute control over nature and God.

Keywords: Corporeal crisis, Domination, Ecofeminism, Exploitation, Female terrain, Nature

Introduction

This paper argues that Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark" demonstrates ecofeminist consciousness of its author, provided that 19th century American literature is not only critical of gender hierarchy, but also "environmentally-aware" (Petersheim & Jones 2015). Hawthorne (1804-1864) was an American novelist and dark-romantic short story writer whose works have gained popularity and become classics of American literature. Hawthorne's oeuvre has been analyzed from different perspectives with a special focus on religion, morality, history and gender. For example, Brenda Wineapple (2001) examines the psychological impact on sexual relations in the story; Robert B. Heilman (1987) focuses on Aylmer's view of science as his religion; Judith Fetterley (1991) reads it as the story of failure rather than success, while Jean Yellin studies the story's criticism of the danger and inefficiency of reform (2001). This is, to the best of my knowledge, the first study that substantially and closely examines "The Birth-Mark" from an ecofeminist perspective, while exploring the systematic ways in which both women and nature are dominated in this short story by male-centred society. This article examines the interdependency and interconnection between

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the suppression of women and nature by building on the ecofeminist belief in the important connections between the unjustified subordination and domination of both (Warren 2000, 1).

Central to ecofeminist theory is the exploration of the systematic ways in which physical and mental forces of society do not only buttress gender hierarchy, but also produce oppressive and destructive means of domination over both women and nature. I use the word domination in this paper in line with Erika Cudworth's understanding of the term as practices of power predicated on difference within a system (2005, 7). Those practices include oppression and exploitation, and they are both intra human and extra human. The author equates the patriarchal oppression of women, which "describes a harsh degree of relations of dominatory power", and the exploitation of nature, which "refers to the use of something [or someone] as a resource for the ends of the user" (Cudworth 2005, 7). Patriarchy entitles itself to a superior position that allows its own subjugation of women for masculine motives as much as humans exploit nature and dominate it to achieve their own materialistic purposes.

Ecofeminist theory, also known as ecological feminism, is a branch of feminism that was introduced by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974) as a "warning that human being cannot survive patriarchy's ecological consequences", and the phallic order endangers both women and nature (Glazebrook 2002, 13). The theorist warns against that gender-hierarchy justifies dangerous male practices that would cause a massive damage to both human and non-human beings, while calling for a world free of hierarchy in which all living creatures interact equally. Ecofeminist theorists therefore argue that masculine control over women and nature is a threat to the continuity of human-human relations and human-nature interconnection. Ecofeminism is also a critical project that shows an awareness of the associations made between women and nature, and the ways in which nature and women are feminised, gendered and dominated by patriarchal (or male-centred) society. This theory therefore examines the effect of gender hierarchy in order to demonstrate the ways in which patriarchal societies exert unjust dominance over women and nature, provided that such culture's unjust hierarchies and systems of domination are connected conceptually (Warren 2000, 7). In her widely-read essay "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism", Karen Warren states that the logic of domination divides the world into bifurcated hierarchies that underlie all forms of oppression and exploitation (Warren 1990). According to the author, this logic is in fact a conceptual framework that encourages hierarchy and mistreatment of nature and subordinate groups, including women. In other words, ecofeminism sees that there is a connection between what women face of subordination and oppression from the patriarchal society and what nature faces of exploitation and degradation.

Such a critical approach to the connections made between the strategies used to control women and the mechanisms used to dominate nature seems especially appropriate in the context of 19th century American literature. 19th century American society propagated that there are biological and mental differences between the man and the woman, a belief that informed the gender-based differentiation and hierarchy, where women should be loving, pretty, delicate, fragile and submissive, and men are of strong, powerful, protective and superior nature. As Susan Cruea (2005, 187) argues, "at that time, women were the continual victims of social and economic discrimination", and even the choices of middle-and upper-class women "were limited to marriage and motherhood, or spinsterhood". These limited choices entail women's subjection to domestic dependency. They had to depend on their husband to gain personal worth and financial support. Hawthorne explores the intricate, ambiguous and complex relation not only between man and woman, husband and wife, but also between the patriarch and nature, the scientist/chemist and

the raw material. This article demonstrates the eco-feminist thoughts in Hawthorne's story "The Birth-Mark" (1843), in particular. This story revolves around a scientist called Aylmer and his beautiful wife Georgiana. After their marriage, Aylmer becomes obsessed with his wife's tiny birthmark which appears on her left cheek and resembles a hand. Aylmer decides to use his knowledge to remove the birthmark. Georgiana herself becomes obsessed with her imperfection, and she is tempted to be subjected to experimentation that promises to erase this birthmark. Aylmer develops a 'perfect elixir' that succeeded in removing the birth mark, but ended Georgiana's life. Read broadly, Aylmer in the story is an allegory for science and Georgiana is an allegory for nature, and they represent power relation, wherein Georgiana/nature should be subjected to the domination and experimentation of Aylmer/science to make the birthmark, which is the product of the supernatural, less unfamiliar and less scary by wiping it out. The narrator says: "It was the fatal flaw of humanity, which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps ineffaceably on all her productions" (Hawthorne 2008, 4). The husband in this story stands for science that tries to improve nature's imperfect products. The story therefore reflects on his futile attempt of a violation of nature's beauty, and it warns against tampering with nature's creations. It suggests that science can never outdo the natural beauty of nature; in other words, the husband's experiment represents how science tries to overturn nature (as much as the patriarch in the 19th century tried to control women). Throughout the story, Georgian is conceived by her husband, as much as science conceives nature, as a passive entity, and her inevitable demise, which comes out of her vulnerability to Aylmer's temptation, mirrors nature's helplessness against the scientist's/Man's destruction of nature while trying to control it. Rucker (1987, 446) argues that Hawthorne demonstrates in his short story that "the artistry of nature, regardless of the apparent coarseness and lack of finish that some products may exhibit, is superior to the artistry of humanity". The story therefore criticises and condemns the superior attitude of human beings and warns against that humans may destroy the existence of nature while trying to perfect its products.

"The Birth-Mark" echoes ecofeminists' standpoint by showing that Aylmer's identification of the imperfection of his wife aimed to relegate her to inferior status and defy the limits of Nature. This is clear when Aylmer says "dearest Georgiana, you come so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect [...] shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection" (Hawthorne 2018, 1). This quotation reflects a certain contradiction in Aylmer's attitude; in his focus on her imperfection, Aylmer reveals his own obsession with this imperfection that would sustain his own passion for scientific experimentation with nature. This attitude accordingly indicates Aylmer's attempt to practice his supreme authority and superior position over both Georgina and nature. Aylmer expresses his disgust and distraught over his wife's birthmark, before he presents himself as the omniscient and omnipotent professor who can fix this "divine error". This is to say the story depicts Aylmer's passion for manipulating nature which caused the flaw in his love for his wife through the use of scientific means. Nature in this story implicates a sense of the divine, which is intrinsically, sacred, good and beautiful. According to Christian traditions, God created the natural world, therefore Aylmer's attempt to change nature can be understood as Man's attempt to recreate God's creation. American romantics also thought of nature as God's product, and those who challenge divine's power learn painful lessons. Aylmer has "faith in man's ultimate control over nature", which parodies the Victorian man's belief in domination over women and their status as "Angel in the House", which is a phrase coming from Coventry Patmore's poem "The Angel in the House", a poem he dedicated to his wife whom he considers perfect (Hawthorne 2018, 1). While Aylmer claims he offers his own services for the sake of Georgina, Hawthorne warns the readers against this rhetoric which reflects Aylmer's

attempt to subjugate Georgina, and thus nature, to his own experimentation to satisfy his spiritual strife and scientific ends. 19th century American writers, especially transcendentalists, glorified the beauty of nature and warned against human and scientific interventions that could distort this beauty. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, depicts nature as a divine beauty and a means of inspiration for human intellect (Castronovo 2012, 394). And Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* represents the call of 19th century American writers to defend nature against the trappings of science and industrial modernity (Castronovo 2012, 394). That is, nature in 19th century American literature is represented 'as a sign of God's beneficent or malevolent design; as a refuge, a place of Edenic simplicity and youthful innocence; as an occasion for introspection, as a source of wealth, as a metaphor for human emotion' (McDonald 2007, 43). Indeed, the birthmark on Georgina's cheek is represented in the story as God's beautiful design, a reflection of mystery and youthful beauty, a site of human feeling and perplexity that impels the scientist's introspection. Aylmer is in quest to achieve his great scientific goal by reaching to immortality, which is not natural, by removing the Crimson Hand on the cheek of his wife, which is natural. As such, Aylmer stands for the masculine violence in ways that demonstrate the concerns of ecofeminists that this violence will result in ecological damage that will have its impact on both humans and non-humans.

The connection between Georgina and nature emanates from the fact that the birthmark is considered as a natural occurrence. Despite all the natural beauty that his wife has, Aylmer is unsatisfied with this beauty because of her birthmark that he considers as a defect. His practices, which included kissing her right cheek, not that which bore the impress of the Crimson Hand, made her plea "cannot you remove this little, little mark, which I cover with the tips of two small fingers! Is this beyond your power, for the sake of your own peace, and to save your poor wife from madness?" (Hawthorne 2018, 4). The story calls the reader to think considerably whether Aylmer's dissatisfaction derives from personal or professional reasons or both. Is it because he feels that his wife is not physically perfect in his eyes as a man, or is it because she is imperfect in his eyes as a scientist which creates an opportunity for scientific experimentation and domination? Such a masculine attitude is criticised by ecofeminism which is "characterized by strong emphasis upon definitions of masculinity which deny, ignore, and attempt to suppress the values of the feminine" (Drengson 1991, 41). Georgina's subservience to her husband stems from his control of her psyche and his ability to drive her into thinking of herself as incomplete, and thus her inability to come to terms with her corporeal crisis. Georgiana cries: "shocks you my husband", "then why did you take me from my mother's side? You cannot love what shocks you!" (Hawthorne 2018, 3). This women's vulnerability reflects an exposure to the patriarchal mechanisms where science can be disguised for sexual idealization, and obsession with perfection can be disguised for women's peace, and driving women into madness can be disguised for imperfection.

In its criticism of the patriarch's idealization, the story criticizes not only man's interest in gender-hierarchy but also his intervention in the course of nature to attain masculine ends. The story clarifies that Aylmer's attempt to exploit and dominate both his wife and nature aims to satisfy the masculine lust for power and superiority. Aylmer undermines Georgina's fear from the experiment by his authoritarian declaration "I have spent much thought upon the subject ... I am convinced of the perfect practicality of its removal" (Hawthorne 2018, 5). Like other romantic and naturalist American writers, Hawthorne warns in this story against the stubbornness of human beings who think they can impose their own power over nature and nature-based creation and demarcation as this might threaten the lives of human beings themselves. As Noel Sturgeon (1997,

26) suggests, ecofeminism makes a connection between the masculine domination over women and “the life-threatening destruction of the environment”. The masculine violent practices are not limited to their patronization of women, but they inform their view of the environment as less dynamic, less powerful and less capable. These connections, Sturgeon continues, reflect problematic identity issues in that “understanding women as more ‘natural’ or closer to nature dooms them to an inferior position [...] If women are equated with nature, their struggle for freedom represents a challenge to the idea of a passive, disembodied, and objectified nature” (Sturgeon 1997, 28). This story introduces nature as something performative, not static and round. It resists the masculine attempt to destroy its existence which he thinks imperfect and awful, while believing that his claimed physical and mental superiority would allow the success of his endeavor. Such a juxtaposition of nature and women in men’s mindset risks reductionism of women into a fixed identity, the main components of it are passivity, disembodiment and objectification, which, in one way or another, legitimises their victimization.

While attempting to criticise the domination over women and nature, the ecofeminist ethos suggests this victimization is the result of ‘capitalist assumptions and practices’. One can sense an ironical attitude in the masculine quest for domination over woman and nature. The same patriarch that equates the woman with mother earth, which he considers divine and sacred, exploits them for his own selfish ends. The presence of non-human nature in this short story is very powerful, and it functions as an antagonist to the dominating and mechanical principles of the anthropocentric society represented by the scientist. “The Birth-Mark” is not only anti-science but also anti-capitalist; it is a warning against misuse of knowledge and power, and the pitfalls of turning human beings and nature into subordinate entity and commodity. Hawthorne criticised this messing with the naturalness of women by stating that husbands who are not satisfied with their “Nature’s ready-made articles” seem to “want a woman manufactured purposely to their order” (cited in Rucker 1987, 450). The husband in this story refuses to accept his wife as beautiful as she is naturally, therefore he uses his scientific knowledge to subject nature’s components to his own selections and thus recreation. Aylmer excludes the sunshine and “had supplied its place with perfumed lamps, emitting flames of various hue” (Hawthorne 2018, 5). Aylmer’s exclusion of the natural sunshine reflects his attempt to replace God and creates his own ideal reality, and substitutes the light of the divine with “perfumed lamps, emitting flames”. Aylmer eliminates as much as of God’s natural world to reconstruct his own version of Georgina who is more “attractive than the original” (Hawthorne 2018, 5). This reflects his attempt to transform naturalized human entities into artificial products so as to satisfy his personal and professional ends. Karl Marx commented on the relation between society and the natural environment, stating that humans shape and alter their surroundings in order to attain their ends (cited in Cudworth 2005, 9). Nature has always been an object of fascination, but its subjection to the appropriation of human beings, who depend on it to make their own projects, has threatened it to elimination. In *Developing Ecofeminist Theory*, Erika Gudworth (2005, 9) adds that “we are dependent on the natural world for the realization of our intellectual and aesthetic powers”. This dependency has proven to be a dangerous and fatal. Hawthorne suggests that even if “a picture, an image, or a shadow” might look “more attractive than the original”, it is vulnerable, artificial, unreal and easily broken (2008, 5). Hawthorne seems to share the ecofeminist concern that the domination over women and nature by male-centred society leads to the “reduction of all things into mere resources to be optimised, dead inert matter to be used” (Gaard & Gruen 1993, 2). This is obvious in the actions of the story where Aylmer was trying to ‘optimise’ Georgiana’s beauty to his own liking as if she was similar to the

crude material he uses for his experiments. Georgina is thus turned into terrain to be explored, reshaped and the birthmark into an impediment that science should wipe out.

The story illustrates ecofeminists' consideration of the ways hierarchies and practices of difference and domination interlock (Cudworth 2005, 1). Aylmer puts all the male-run advancement of science into his own service, allowing Georgina to trust in his claim of superiority to solve what he convinces her to be a corporeal crisis. She addresses him with that "you have deep science! All the world bears witness of it. You have achieved great wonders", while imploring him to remove the birthmark and spare her from madness (Hawthorne 2018, 4). This is another instance of difference and hierarchy-based domination, which Hawthorne warns against, especially the obsession of Aylmer is with the promises of science to make someone or something perfect, not with his wife's condition. Georgina is subjected to a systematic process of domination, which is, according to ecofeminism, manifested in a harsh degree of difference and hierarchy practice; it is an institutional process which reflects the use of the rhetoric of power and promise as a resource for the ends of Aylmer and scientific community at the same time. The power of science does not reside only in its application of theories, but also in its ability to entice promises. Aylmer says to Georgiana "do not mistrust me, dearest ... here is a powerful cosmetic. With a few drops of this, in a vase of water, freckles may be washed away as easily as the hands are cleansed" (Hawthorne 2018, 9). Hawthorne warns against the consequences of submission to these male-dominated scientific promises, which are tempting, costly and yield submission. Society states that the role of the man is to perpetuate the accepted hierarchy that derives from difference and power, and the woman's role is that of subordination and consent that provides support which man's success is in need of:

"It has made me worship you more than ever," said she. "Ah! wait for this one success," rejoined he, "then worship me if you will. I shall deem myself hardly unworthy of it. But, come! I have sought you for the luxury of your voice. Sing to me, dearest!" (Hawthorne 2018, 8).

In this way, the woman represses her fears and concerns, conforming again to the assigned gender roles in the 19th century, playing again the role of an obedient wife. Hawthorne seems to suggest that in patriarchal society women are doomed, and they will never be able to survive the gender expectations placed upon them as far as they do not question patriarchal authority. Resetarits (2012, 179) argues that it is true the husband seeks to remove the birth mark to make his wife perfect, but the wife in "The Birthmark" is complicit in her own demise since she willingly swallows the elixir that kills her. Previous critics of this story overlooked the fact that Aylmer's notion of perfection is not limited to removing the birthmark that allows sexual idealization, but also to make a perfect wife suitable to the institution of the Victorian marriage that dictates submission and obedience. Georgina initially responds to Aylmer's suggestion to remove the birthmark with that: "to tell you the truth, it has been so often called a charm" (Hawthorne 2018, 5). Although Georgina is personally satisfied with the presence of the birthmark, she knows that she has no choice but to be perfect in the eyes of her husband and society, and thus comply with her husband's and patriarchal conceptions. That is, the perfect woman was the woman who dedicated herself and all resources to the well being of her husband and the patriarchal society. She was expected to repress her wishes and she had no power over her own person or mind. An angel in the house presupposes perfection, and human beings by their nature are not perfect, therefore women cannot be perfect and thus they cannot meet the standards of that society to only

increase their feeling of insecurity, inferiority and oppression. In patriarchal societies, both the repressed woman and the exploited nature are marginalized in ways that suggest their inferiority. They are considered as subordinate to the patriarchal community whose oppressive structure is beyond question. Georgina's demise is therefore due to the shared assumption of both the husband and the wife that fixed gender roles dictate that women are always expected to be subordinate to their husbands.

The story asserts that the inevitable imperfection of human beings is natural, and it symbolises their inevitable demise. The narrator in the story says of the crimson hand:

it was the fatal flaw of humanity which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps ineffaceably on all her productions, either to imply that they are temporary and finite, or that their perfection must be wrought by toil and pain (Hawthorne 2018, 2).

Aylmer thinks that in his attempt to eradicate the birthmark, he could transform Georgina from the product of nature into man's own eternalised copy. He seems to contest God's female terrain, and to claim his ability to recreate and reintegrate it in ways that show absolute control over nature. The toil and pain of the scientist proves to be fruitless as Man cannot recreate earthly-form human beings. At the end of the story, the wife, while dying, says to Aylmer "you have rejected the best that earth could offer" (Hawthorne 2018, 10). This is to say Hawthorne, showing ecofeminist consciousness, debates our violent interaction with nature, which is based on thinking that human beings can possess a supernatural power that can make perfect what is imperfect. David Pepper (1996, 111) criticises that humans violently interact with nature and thereby change it. He believes that this interaction with nature is both material, which includes physical change to the environment, forms of human labor power and technological development, and ideological which influences how we think about nature. The question of hierarchy and difference in this context mirrors the "passivity" of nature and ecology which is usually put into the service of advancement in science and technology, wherein the narrative is that human progress should not be substituted for natural conservativeness. This dichotomy informs the unjust male mastery over the woman and nature, and its threats will remain "within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination" (Ruether 1975, 204).

By building on the ecofeminist central belief in "the convergence between women and nature", one can argue that Georgina stands for pre-colonial America (Pepper 1996, 108). The dominant culture perverts nature while attempting to re-create and reshape it as a special property, as much as early American settlers attempted to recreate and reshape the land they colonised to fit their idea of a biblical Eden, viewing "the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing [*environing*] the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose and painless and integral satisfaction" (Kolondy 1984, 4). Warren (2000, 1) argues that understanding the system of the domination of nature helps understand the subordination of women and their inferior status cross-culturally. The patriarchal colonists subordinated Native America as an ideal woman, which resonates with Aylmer's cherished fantasy of idealization. He addresses Georgiana with "you are fit for heaven without tasting death", before he declares "by Heaven, it is well nigh gone!" (Hawthorne 2008, 10). This analysis reflects the supreme beauty of both America and Georgina, who is a product of American nature, in the eyes of those who did not encroach over their terrain. Leo Marx (2008, 9-10) argues that "it would be foolish to deny that when Europeans first encountered American nature, it truly was [...] exceptional [...] in its immensity, its

spectacular beauty”. This correlates with the fascination of Georgina’s past lovers with her beauty who massively impressed them. The narrator says that:

Georgina’s lovers were wont to say, that some fairy, at her birth-hour, had laid her tiny hand upon the infant’s cheek, and left this impress there, in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts (Hawthorne 2008, 4).

Both Georgina and native America were naturally beautiful before they were touched, exploited and manipulated for human ends. Native Americans, as much as other colonized people, expressed in their resistance against colonialism ecological consciousness. They stood against the colonialists’ aggressive exploitation of natural resources and their destruction of natural habitations that they have honored over the years. This discussion invokes, for example, the speech of Seattle—the Indian chief of the Suwamish tribe—which he delivers in response to the US president Franklin Pierce’s letter, in 1854, during the Westward expansion, that asks him to buy the territories in which Native Americans were settled. In return, Seattle responds in his famous speech with an explanation that Natives and nature are interconnected and they have mutual affinity that the colonizers are unable to understand and seek to violate, and thus exploit the land. The colonizers across ages have imagined the Natives’ land as something to be conquered, subdued and raped. Ecofeminism accentuates that women and nature are connected in significant ways because both confront the same patriarchal authority, which introduces itself as superior to women and nature.

Hawthorne calls for a reimagining and reconfiguration of man’s position in relation to nature and women, which necessitates an interrogation of the mechanisms through which the patriarch has constructed himself superior to nature and women, a hierarchisation that has been complicit in colonialist and discriminate exploitation of ecology. According to Native American oral traditions, the coming of the White colonizers marks “the ending of peace and primal unity and the beginning of loss and division” (Gray 2004, 5). “In the old, old days, before Columbus 'discovered' us, as they say,” one White River Sioux story goes, “we were even closer to the animals than we are now. Many people could understand the animal languages; they could talk to a bird, gossip with a butterfly. Animals could change themselves into people and people into animals” (Gray 2004, 5). Native Americans believe that they have to honor mother earth and take care of it, centering their ceremonies on observing the instructions of how live on earth – that is spiritually, which is something the White colonizers repressed and ignored, causing ecological degradation that has profoundly threatened survival of all species on the planet earth.

Hawthorne seems to argue this patriarchal mindset has undermined the important roles women and nature play in promoting ecological prosperity. According to Cuomo (2002, 7), women and nature were “seen as a source of ecological and social flourishing that is violently degraded in patriarchal cultures”. It is interesting that nature in this story is not perceived as the other, but rather as a living entity which shares the same destiny of the natives, entangled by the apocalyptic consequences of the colonial project. Ecofeminists therefore makes the connection between women and nature because they are similarly significant and valuable, and their significance and value are similarly dominated, abused or violated by men and patriarchal institutions. Hawthorne’s reflection on the destruction of both humans and non-humans by patriarchal practices is further reinforced in his rumination on the sacred and intimate relation between humans and nature, and, according to him, any violation to this sacredness means elimination and rupture.

Can we therefore read Aylmer as the European coloniser who has brought destruction to the new world/Georgiana with the claim of improvement/perfection? Many feminist critics have felt inclined to interpret patriarchal structures of oppression and domination as structures of colonialism itself. They argue that the patriarch, in like fashion to the colonizer, seeks to control, dominate (female) terrain so as to obtain resources through dispossession, marginalization, subjugation and exploitation (Spencer-Wood 2016). By using religious and cultural discourses, this patriarchal/colonial power claims that its domination aims to reconstruct the indigenous terrain in ways that would improve it and make it perfect. This rhetoric applies to Aylmer's quest for domination and reformation of his wife. In the beginning, the coloniser/Aylmer had a huge fascination with the angel-like Georgiana which he describes as more suitable for Eden, before he uses science to reshape, spoil and destroy her humanity. Early settlers, including William Bradford, read nature from a religious perspective claiming that it is imperfect and hideous, unlike what they thought before they approached it. According to Leo Marx (2008, 10), early settlers had the idea that nature in America is a space of temptation and sin, which "effectively erases the humanity of the indigenous Americans". European colonizers sought redemption and spiritual refinement upon their encounter with the continent. Analogously, Aylmer after marriage started thinking of his wife as liable to sin, and his pursuit of perfection is equitable to redemption. This is probably related to the original sin of human beings, wherein "the birthmark represents the flaws within the human race—which includes original sin", which "woman has cast men into" (Steven 1986, 46). According to Gary, Judeo-Christian and Western tradition are based on the religious myth of the inferiority of women, and they therefore should step back from this myth and look at it from "a perspective of a feminist consciousness and realizing that these myths are patriarchal – i.e., they rationalise and justify a society that puts men 'up' and women 'down'" (Warren 2000, 30). This short story, with its powerful religious overtones, demonstrates Hawthorne's ecofeminist consciousness. Hawthorne's oeuvre shows a great deal of criticism of the puritan traditions, and his work is highly preoccupied with the original sin, guilt and redemption. This story, in particular, distrusts the puritan brutish treatment of nature. In like fashion to *The Scarlet Letter*, this story could be read as a comment on the destruction and estrangement of nature by Puritans. Hawthorne expresses in this short story a great sympathy for the oppressed women in the male-dominated society as much as he criticizes the rule of nature by men in ways that relegate both to a subordinate position.

Hawthorne's story can therefore be read as a lament for the loss of humanity's intimate relations with nature. Why Emerson asks, "should not we enjoy an original relation to the universe?" (Marx 2008, 13). Aylmer attempts to complexify this relation. Georgina reflects our own original copy, our own imperfection, the nature of our nature, while Aylmer's attempts to perfect her reflect deviation from innate identity and existence. Therefore, the author condemns the human desire to reform and reshape God's nature. Leo Marx (2008, 15) argues that American history has witnessed continuous attempts to use knowledge and science as a means of control over nature, with the promise of improvement in the conditions of life. Underlying this attitude is the incursion of the industrial revolution and modern science over nature since it has been seen a significant source of our knowledge and our raw materials. That is, nature has always been considered an entity waited to be dominated. Read in the light of ecofeminism, this reflects the equation of nature and women as subordinate entities necessary for the progress of male-dominated society which considers women and nature as exploitable commodities that should serve the interest of male-led society.

In this short story, Hawthorne warns the human being against “spend[ing] all his life and splendid talents in trying to achieve something naturally impossible-as to make a conquest over nature” (cited in Rucker 1987, 446). Aylmer is one of those people who spent all his splendid talents in attempting something naturally impossible, a conquest over nature to be encountered with its ‘hoarse, chuckling laugh’ upon the death of his wife (Hawthorne 2018, 11). As Karl Marx argues, “Man lives from nature, i.e. nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die” (Cudworth 2005, 31). Aylmer does not believe in God or the natural laws he created, which is obvious by his belief in man’s ultimate control over nature. He controls the dialogue with Georgina, and he orients it towards scientific means that could improve God’s errors in his creatures, to learn the lesson God created man as a part of nature and we are not above nature but integrated into it.

Conclusion

Ecofeminism instructs that the relation between humans and nature should be sustained through mutual unity, care and cooperation. Nature and Georgina are mutually united through their shared oppression by the male-dominated society. In her book *Rape of the Wild: Man’s Violence Against Animals and the Earth*, Andree Collard and Joyce Contrucci (1989, 137—138) underscore that women’s struggle for liberation is linked with the ecological struggle against the destruction of nature:

feminist values and principles directed towards ending the oppression of women are inextricably linked to ecological values and principles directed towards ending the oppression of nature. It is ultimately the affirmation of our kinship with nature, of our common life with her, which will prove the source of mutual well being.

Ecofeminism views its struggle to end the suppression of women and exploitation of nature by male-based society as a sacred quest to save the lives of human and non-human living beings. Ecofeminism warns against looking at the world from exclusively male perspective. This critical school of thought advocates a feminist attitude that seeks to restore harmony in the global environment seriously threatened by the repression of nature as well as the female. Ecofeminists maintain that we should think of the identification of woman and nature as something enabling and liberating, arguing, in Murray Bookchin’s words, that “the better treatment of the environment can only come with the abolition of oppressive hierarchies in human society” (cited in Waugh 2006, 536). The “Birthmark” shares the same ecofeminist concerns by representing Georgina as the victim of male oppression Aylmer’s who tries to defy limits of nature and creates his own ideal reality that outdo God’s reality. It is therefore apt to conclude with Hawthorne’s warning against such practices: “a person to be in the possession of something as perfect as mortal man has a right to demand; he tries to make it better, and ruins it entirely” (cited in Rucker 1987, 446).

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