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# Dimmesdale's Masochistic Fantasy: A Deleuzian Reading of *The Scarlet Letter*

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## Abstract
Critics differ on Dimmesdale's masochistic suffering, specifically, on whether masochism ennobles him. Deleuze's theory reveals the fantasy of male masochists, which arouses disagreements on power relation between male masochist and authority. Dimmesdale, the protagonist of Nathanial Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, chooses masochism under compulsion to maintain both his public position and moral purity. His masochistic performance grants both himself and the readers a masochistic fantasy of ennobling suffering, concealing the fact that a masochist has no courage nor power either to rebel against or to accept reality.

**Key words:** Male Masochism; Deleuze; Dimmesdale; power; performance

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## 1. SUFFERING ENNOBLES MASOCHISTS?

> In Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, under lock and key, there was a bloody scourge. Oftentimes, this Protestant and Puritan divine had plied it on his own shoulders, laughing bitterly at himself the while, and smiting so much the more pitilessly because of that bitter laugh. It was his custom, too, as it has been that of many other pious Puritans, to fast—not however, like them, in order to purify the body, and render it the fitter medium of celestial illumination—but rigorously, and until his knees trembled beneath him, as an act of penance. He kept vigils, likewise, night after night, sometimes in utter darkness, sometimes with a glimmering lamp, and sometimes, viewing his own face in a looking-glass, by the most powerful light which he could throw upon it. He thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify himself. (Hawthorne, 1878, p.93)

This passage from *The Scarlet Letter* is a typical description of a masochist's self-torture in its representative model: whips, fast, vigil, and mirrors. Hawthorne creates a perverse male masochist even before Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, whose name is used to denote this perversion. Dimmesdale, as a learned young clergyman of "very striking aspect" and sickly body, with a hidden secret concerning sexual misconduct with a beautiful married woman, tortured by his own extreme abnormality in self-punishment and by the demonic revenge executed by the cuckolded husband in rage, is naturally a melodramatic figure, fascinating and disturbing in his masochism.

Critics' readings of Dimmesdale differ. Compared with almost unanimous favor of Hester's transcendental independence and abomination of Chillingworth's obsessional revenge which dehumanizes himself, the readers' and critics' attitudes towards Dimmesdale are polarized: some of them sublimate him as "tragic hero"(Granger, p.201) and some other condemn him to be "small man" (Nolte, p.168); some believe that he is under Hester's sexual power and victim of Chillingworth's evil revenge while some other consider him as the manipulating male with the real power.

Critics' special attention on Dimmesdale perhaps begins with Henry James' statement (1879) that *The Scarlet Letter* is primarily the story, not of Hester Prynne, but of Dimmesdale, that "more wretched and pitiable culprit", and "it is upon her guilty lover that the author projects most frequently the cold, thin rays of his fitfully-moving lantern" (p.186). Though there is a consensus of Dimmesdale's weakness, critics go quite counter to

each other on whether Dimmesdale is admirable for his masochistic self-torture. William H. Nolte argues against Mark Van Doren and Randall Stewart bitterly on their defense for Dimmesdale's suffering. Doren feels that Dimmesdale is finally redeemed "because his suffering makes him beautiful and because Hester continues to love him", and Stewart, with more admiration, actually claims that Dimmesdale is the tragic hero of the novel (Nolte, p.185). Bruce Grange holds the similar conviction that Dimmesdale is the tragic hero and he punishes himself because "he knows himself to be a sinner and never mistakes penance done on earth for penitence" (202). Nolte refutes their claims, writing mockingly that "I fail to see how his suffering, largely masochistic, makes him in any way beautiful…the agony a character undergoes does not mean that he is, *ipso facto*, a hero. We can, and must, pity Dimmesdale. But pity alone is hardly enough to make a man heroic…in our pity for the weaklings and misfits there is always the tincture of nausea and revulsion." (pp.185-6) At the end of his essay, Nolte predicts with bitter sarcasm: "It is also fairly obvious that Dimmesdale will continue to find admiring readers who are addicted to the outlandish belief that suffering ennobles, when the fact is that suffering generally degrades, as in the case of Dimmesdale…these readers will find support from various critics, who, after all, should know better." (p.186) Ironically, Nolte's prediction is probably proved to be true by generations of readers after him. Does Dimmesdale's abnormal and masochistic suffering indeed ennoble him and grant him any special power over Salem people? We have to get to the essence of male masochism first.

## 2. DELEUZE AND MALE MASOCHISM

Though so far there emerges a vast range of writing concerning masochism in both fields of cultural theory and psychoanalytical theory, it is necessary to return to Deleuze's influential *Coldness and Cruelty* to uncover the myth of male masochism for the following reasons. First of all, recent cultural and psychological theories concerning masochism contradict each other at a number of levels[1], and the ambiguities arise on the definition, characteristics, behavior form, consequence and dynamics, almost all of the pivotal problems relating masochism. It becomes a difficult time defining masochism relying on numerous contemporary theories. Secondly, Deleuze's conception of masochism is derived directly from the writing of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, which is, undoubtedly, belonging to the criteria of literature. As in Restuccia's words: "From art masochism arose, and to art it will herein return" (p.101). Deleuze himself urges his students to take "literary approach" in the research of masochism:

> We need to go back to the beginning and read Sade and Masoch. Because the judgment of the clinician is prejudiced, we must take an entirely different approach, the *literary approach*, since it is from literature that stem the original definition of sadism and masochism…the clinical specificities of sadism and masochism are not separable from the literary values peculiar to Sade and Masoch. (p.14)

Thus, *Coldness and Cruelty* sets the terms for many literary critics. Finally, Deleuzian masochism is mainly male, and quite a few literary critics cite Deleuze to support their reading of male masochism in literary works, therefore to understand male masochist like Dimmesdale and his power, the application of Deleuze more than requisite.

Distinguished from the common psychoanalytic assumption that masochism equates to femininity, Deleuze's theory puts male in the suffering position along with a tradition set by Kraff-Ebing and Theodore Reik[2]. Deleuze's purpose of writing *Coldness and Cruelty* is to challenge the belief in a sadomasochistic entity, or more specifically, to separate sadism and masochism as two different types of perversions which do not communicate with each other. At the end of his very long essay, Deleuze summarizes his inquiry in eleven propositions accounting for the differences between masochism and sadism, and equally for the differences in the art of Masoch and Sade. Among the eleven propositions, the fifth one distinguishes sadism and masochism from the perspective of gender orientation: "sadism negates the mother and inflates the father, masochism disavows the mother and abolishes the father" (p.134). In Deleuze's words, the (male) masochist is "hermaphrodite":

> A contract is established between the hero and the woman, whereby at a precise point in time and for a determinate period she is given every right over him. By this means the masochist tries to exorcise the danger of the father and to ensure that the temporal order of reality and experience will be in conformity with the symbolic order, in which the father has been abolished for all time. Through the contract …the masochist reaches toward the most mythical and the most timeless realms, where the three mother-images dwell. Finally, he ensures that he will be beaten; …what is beaten, humiliated and ridiculed in him is the image and the likeness of the father, and the possibility of the father's aggressive return. (p.66)

Two points need special attention here: first, the contract between the masochist and his torturer indicates the active role of the masochist. He gives her the right over him, which means he can also reclaim his power

[1] John Kucich has done a careful survey of the theories and researches concerning masochism in his essay "Melancholy Magic: Masochism, Stevenson, Anti-Imperialism" in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 56, No.3 (December 2001), pp. 364-400.

[2] Krafft-Ebing, who creates the term of "masochism", cites only four female cases of masochism to thirty-three of malein his *Psychopathia Sexualis*; and Theodore Reik, in his observation finds "the male sex is more masochistic than female", which is cited in Kaja Silverman's "Masochism and Male Subjectivity", in *Male Trouble*, ed. Penley, Constance & Willis, Sharon. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1993, p.37.

as he likes. The masochist is an active initiator rather than a passive sufferer. Second, the masochist identifies himself as a son obeying his mother, who is projected on his torturer, and identifies her as law, in order to expel the father from the symbolic order. Connecting the above two points together, we will find masochist's trick, he creates a relationship with his torturer, who seemingly punishes and controls him as almighty mother but actually is under his command; in his fantasy he grants the torturer all the power to resist for him against the Father (social order) because he dare not do it directly, and in this way he gets the excuse not to do it; the masochist appears to rebel against the Father but he makes himself the actual "FATHER" in his masochistic fantasy.

In Deleuze's theory, the masochist is "a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes" (Deleuze, 1991, p.20). The masochist forms and educates his own torturer, who is always female in Deleuze's writing. The masochist will always hold real power on his torturer, not because his gender or other power derived from his social identity, but because he creates his torturer in this relationship (which is formed through a contract in Deleuze's theory) and can terminate this relationship in any minute and thus enjoys his privilege over the torturer in *real*. It is the masochist, rather than his torturer, enjoys the pleasure and holds the real power to command; at the meantime, it is the sadist, rather than his victim, takes the commanding role. (Therefore, a true sadist and a true masochist will never be a couple). The pain given by the torturer is in reality required by the masochist himself. And, according to Deleuze, the masochist is "not a strange being who find pleasure in pain, but he is like everyone else…the simple difference being that for him pain, punishment or humiliation are necessary prerequisites to obtaining gratification" (p.71). Therefore, to enjoy the pleasure prohibited by social norm, or the Law, or Father, the masochist creates a fantasy in which a torturer, allied with him through a contract, punishes him under his own demand. In receiving the punishment or humiliation, the masochist convinces himself (or an audience) that he has already been punished, even more severely, thus he is allowed to enjoy the illicit end; as if enjoyment is the payment of the punishment he willingly received from a torturer under his own command. The masochist is a rebel against social law indeed, and he manipulates his power to escape social recrimination while enjoying his pleasure, but in other words, he is not capable of accepting real punishment but in stead creates a fantasy in which he punishes himself safely, even if the hurt is real. He is a "rebel" scared of reality and in fact has no power to change social order at all because his way of "rebelling" is to evade.

## 3. DISAGREEMENTS ON MALE MASOCHISM

Jonathan Noyes tries to seek the essence of masochism in his insightful work *The Mastery of Submission: Inventions of Masochism*:

> The masochist's body was invented in the late nineteenth century as a machine that could do one of two things, depending on how it was regarded, how it was used, or where it was positioned. It could reduce socially nonproductive aggressivity to an individual pathology, or it could transform social control into sexual pleasure. The one use of the masochist's body supports the project of socially sanctioned aggression and the various stereotypes society has developed in order to invest cultural identity with aggressivity. The other use of the masochist's body subverts this project, initiating an unsettling process whereby cultural identity is parodied, masqueraded, and appropriated in the name of pleasure. These two uses initiate all the conflicts surrounding masochism as we understand it today (pp.9-10).

Noyes' two uses of masochism have been understood by some critics from the perspective of gender: in Anna Jones' words, "the normative (reassuring) kind attached to feminine interpellation, the 'unsettling' parodic kind attached to masculine perversion" (p.202). Nevertheless, it can also be understood as two uses of male masochism, "either as a wizard of symbolic manipulations, annihilating social order through the sleight-of-hand of sexual pleasure and conceptual inversion, or as an abject martyr whose limitless disempowerment reconfirms the omnipotence of those same social systems" (Kucich, p.376). There arises the disagreement on whether male masochism destabilizes male gender-identity and authority, or reconfirms patriarchy.

Kaja Silverman, following Deleuze to separate masochism and sadism, defends male masochism as heroic rebel against patriarchal norms, "representing one way" to "negotiate a different psychic relation to the Laws of Language and Kinship Structure than that dictated by the dominant fiction" (p.213). Along with her, Carol Siegel argues that masochism releases men from their gender roles in *Male Masochism: Modern Revisions of the Story of Love.*

Arguing against them, Suzanne R. Stewart, from the perspective of history and culture, researches on male masochism from 1870 to 1940 and discovers that male masochists pretend suffering from their own "sexual marginality" to secure their authority. Echoing Stewart in the field of literary study, Ellen B. Rosenman compares female masochist and male masochist protagonists in Victorian melodramas to distinguish their different position in suffering, that women cannot "throw off" their "performance", but men take masochism as a mask for some "intractable conflicts" of masculinity; and to stress the power of male masochists. Rosenman cites Deleuze's comment to support her discovery of the ruse of male masochism, "What insolence and humor, what irrepressible defiance and ultimate triumph lie hidden

behind an ego that claims to be so weak" (Deleuze, 1991, p.124). Rosenman is reasonable in her understanding of masochism as "an acting-out of suffering to achieve some socially-censured end…aims to accomplish something beyond suffering" and "a performance staged by the sufferer, designed to convince an audience that the sufferer deserves sympathy, however deeply he or she has sinned" (pp.23-24) for both female and male masochists, but her conclusion of gendering masochism as passive female and disingenuous male is arguable. To testify her proposition that men and women do not suffer equally, Rosenman takes the masochistic heroine, Lady Isabel, from Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* as a reference to the masochistic hero, Robert Audley, from Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. The problem is that the comparison between Isabel and Robert is fair to show the gendering between male and female masochism, because these two protagonists employ very different position in the plot of their respective novel.

Patrick Brantlinger describes the common plot of sensational novel in his "What is 'Sensational' about the 'Sensational Novel'?":

> The sensation novel was and is sensational partly because of content: it deals with crime, often murder as an outcome of adultery and sometimes of bigamy, in apparently proper, bourgeois, domestic settings....
>
> The best sensation novels are also, as Kathleen Tillotson points out, "novels with a secret," or sometimes several secrets, in which new narrative strategies were developed to tantalise the reader by withholding information rather than divulging it. (p.30)

A typical plot of sensational novel is the discovering of a fatal secret of a mysterious man/woman by a truth-seeking detective (professional or amateur). Lady Isabel occupies the position of a mysterious and illicit woman, while Robert Audley takes the role of the disciplinary detective; they stand on polarities. Although they both show some masochist symptom, it does not mean that they can be compared with each other as respective representative of female and male masochists at the same level. Lady Isabel's sexual misconduct determines that she cannot throw off her performance of pain in that context; while Robert, without any form of real fault, can freely move from his parodic suffering from the "power" of women to the male power granted to him by the plot and patriarchal society. Robert uses masochism as a disguise for the power he inherently has, rather than gaining power from masochism, like Lady Isabel; and thus, Robert in fact returns to his gender role finally and proves the omnipotence of patriarchal authority.

Robert is exactly a literary figure pretending suffering from the "marginality" of his own sex (male sex) to assure the hegemony that men hold all the time, as described in Stewart's book. He represents, to be sure, one important aspect of male masochism, but not all types of that. There are other models, such as, a male masochist standing in a similar position to that of Lady's Isabel's, a passive one forced to take the role. We may find more about male masochism through reading of Dimmesdale.

## 4. DIMMESDALE AND MALE MASOCHISM

*The Scarlet Letter* is, undoubtedly，not a Victorian sentimental novel. Though published during the Victorian Age, it is written on another continent and about a specific period of history in a very different country. And Hawthorne's masterpiece cannot be classified into the genre of sensation novel for its philosophical core and its passionless and cold tone. However, the apparent differences do not exclude the possibility that Hawthorne may borrow some sensational plot to suit the taste of his readers, of whom the majority are women from middle-class families, ---almost the same readers of sensation novels. Male masochists are not rare among sensational novels during Hawthorne's period, and the basic plot of *The Scarlet Letter*——sexually misconduct, the anonymous adulterer, the cuckolded husband seeking truth and revenge---is surely not Hawthorne's exclusive creation[3]. It is easy to find a protagonist as Dimmesdale in a sensational novel---a man of certain social position concealing his evil secret, punishing himself for remorse and cowardice.

Dimmesdale appears at the beginning with "a young man's over-softness"(Hawthorne, 1878, p.40), and the third-person narration tells us this young clergyman is "a person of very striking aspect, with a white, lofty, and impending brow; large, brown, melancholy eyes, and a mouth which, unless when he forcibly compressed it, was apt to be tremulous, expressing both nervous sensibility and a vast power of self restraint", with "an apprehensive, a startled, a half-frightened look"(41). Hawthorne's choice of words in his description of Dimmesdale is more feminine than masculine; the tenderness, melancholy and fragility render the young man a neuter "angel" (p.41), or otherwise, a hermaphrodite. Dimmesdale's feminine traits also display in his abundant emotions, shown specifically in his speech.

In Dimmesdale's first utterance to Hester we see his revealing of emotions for the first time, following with numerous other occasions. "The young pastor's voice was tremulously sweet, rich, deep, and broken. The feeling that it so evidently manifested, rather than the direct purport of the words, caused it to vibrate within all hearts, and brought the listeners into one accord of sympathy" (p.41). The presentation of emotions is tightly clinging to Dimmesdale's speech, in his pleading for Hester's right to keep Pearl, in his argue with Chillingworth, and

3 This plot of wife, husband and lover is very popular, and that of *The Scarlet letter* is very similar to the plot of *Adam Blair* (1822) by John Gibson Lockhart.

in his every sermon, especially the last one. His passion alerts Chillingworth and makes the wise old-man suspect Dimmesdale's nature: "how passion takes hold upon this man, and hurrieth him out of himself! As with one passion so with another. He hath done a wild thing ere now, this pious Master Dimmesdale, in the hot passion of his heart." (88) On other occasions, strange enough, his passion only grants him more power to persuade and affect other people, even though the Puritanism in fact does not recommend the impact of emotions in preaches (White, pp.36-73). Through his full passionate sermons, Dimmesdale transgresses not only the gender role——emotional is almost synonym to feminine——but also the puritan order for clergyman, however, the outcome is that Dimmesdale enjoys a power in his speech and sermon which his other learned and respectable colleagues don't have. In Hawthorne's description, "All that they lacked was, the gift that descended upon the chosen disciples at Pentecost, in tongues of flame; symbolizing, it would seem, not the power of speech in foreign and unknown languages, but that of addressing the whole human brotherhood in the heart's native language." (p.91) Dimmesdale's fall, his commission of adultery together with his omission of his sin in flesh cause him great pain but also a privilege to understand the "heart's native language" because sin is the essence of human brotherhood. His sin and secret force Dimmesdale to interrogate his soul in extreme ways in self-examination, and this process helps Dimmesdale develop a skill of perceiving the deepest, the most secret thoughts of human heart. Through his own suffering from transgressing Law, Dimmesdale understands the pain of all transgressors, namely, the whole bunch of humans, thus he gains the power to "express the highest truths through the humblest medium of familiar words and images" (p.91).

Dimmesdale's turning into a masochist happens, probably, in his decision of omitting the adultery he has committed. When he is forced by clergyman John Wilson to interrogate Hester for the name of her "fellow sufferer" publicly, Dimmesdale gives a "masterpiece of double talk" (Baym, p.18). Through his persuasive plead for Hester to/not to release his name[4], Dimmesdale grants Hester, who knows his secret alone, the prerogative of giving away his name to the public or not, and thus Dimmesdale partly evades his fault of omitting his sin by surrendering to Hester' power, as if it is her mistake to conceal his name and to deny him "the bitter, but wholesome, cup"(41), and it is her command for him to "hide a guilty heart through life" and to suffer from it. In delicately employed manipulation, Dimmesdale educates Hester into his alliance and his torturer. Their liaison lies not only in the sin of flesh committed by both of them, but also in disavowal of Dimmesdale from the sin by both of them. The crimson letter is more than a stigma of adultery: it is also a badge for "Alliance", the contract signed between Hester and Dimmesdale to confirm their relation in Dimmesdale's masochistic fantasy. In Hester's mind "there dwelt, there trode, the feet of one with whom she deemed herself connected in a union that, unrecognized on earth, would bring them together before the bar of final judgment" (p.50), therefore she embroiders the letter on her breast in "her delicate and imaginative" skill, as a "specimen" (p.51), a reminder of the contract between her and Dimmesdale. And "once in many days, or perchance in many months", she fells his eye upon "the ignominious brand, that seemed to give a momentary relief, as if half of her agony were shared. The next instant, back it all rushed again, with still a deeper throb of pain; for, in that brief interval, she had sinned anew." (p.54) Hawthorne asks: "Had Hester sinned alone?" (p.54) The question is rhetoric. We can imagine every time after the young clergyman sees the sign, how he will torture himself in his closet to carry out Hester's "command". By means of physical suffering, he convinces himself that he has being punished and paid for his sin, only more severely than what should be, and then he can maintain his moral freedom, rid of the sinful flesh.

The stigma in Dimmesdale's flesh, functions for him not only as the contract, but also a mark, a symbol of his deserting and condemning of his flesh. Peter Brooks has discussed the meaning of mark on the body, "The 'mark' constituted the sign of the outlaw whose excluded body puts the social body into question…The mark is a version of *la croix de ma mere,* the melodramatic sign of recognition. But the sign branded on the body is a bit different from the mother's cross or other token most often worn by the hero or heroine of melodrama: the metonymy of identification has become incorporate, a part of the body, a metaphor of inner identity" (p.73). Chillingworth's finding of the A on Dimmesdale's bosom fulfills the recognition function of this mark, and the other function, fulfilled by Dimmesdale himself, is to semioticize his body, or in other words, to diminish the body as only sinful flesh, in contrast to pure spirit. Dimmesdale's fantasy is in the separation of his flesh and spirit, as Chillingworth comments: "You, sir, of all men whom I have known, are he whose body is the closest conjoined, and imbued, and identified, so to speak, with the spirit whereof it is the instrument."(Hawthorne, p.87) Through physically punishing himself, Dimmesdale represses his flesh to such a degree that it is no longer a half of the whole composed of flesh and spirit together, but only a tool of the supreme spirit which Dimmesdale

4 .William H. Nolte in "Hawthorne's Dimmesdale: A Small Man Gone Wrong," *New England Quarterly 38* (1965); Nina Baym in *The Scarlet Letter: A Reading, Twayne's Masterwork Studies 1* (Bostan: Twayne Publisher, 1986); and Kenneth D. Pimple in his "Dimmesdale's Moral Character" *Studies in the Novel;* Vol.25,No.3 (1993) all persuasively argue for Dimmesdale's manipulative power in talking Hester to keep his secret.

cherishes and tries to purify. In Dimmesdale's reasoning for a sinner keeps rather than confess his sin, he reveals to us his fantasy:

> "it may be that they are kept silent by the very constitution of their nature. Or—can we not suppose it? —guilty as they may be, retaining, nevertheless, a zeal for God's glory and man's welfare, they shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, thenceforward, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service." (p.85)

Dimmesdale's ambition is truly narcissistic; he holds the "zeal for God's glory and man's welfare", and keeps his dark secret to give "better service"! What a martyr! His suffering is for the welfare of man kind. But compare to his words, we do not see any hint of Dimmesdale actually rescuing anyone from hell, but "the virgins of his church grew pale around him, victims of a passion so imbued with religious sentiment, that they imagined it to be all religion, and brought it openly, in their white bosoms" (Hawthorne, p.92). In his reasoning with Chillingworth, Dimmesdale makes himself clear that the only one has the right to judge him or pity him is the God: "There can be, if I forbode aright, no power, short of the Divine mercy, to disclose, whether by uttered words, or by type or emblem, the secrets that may be buried in the human heart." (p.84) And under His judgment, "the hearts holding such miserable secrets… will yield them up, at that last day, not with reluctance, but with a joy unutterable." (p.84) This God is not the Puritan God who stresses the public confession of one's sin, but Dimmesdale's God. Between Dimmesdale and his own God, there is no body else. Imagining his God watching, judging and pitying him, Dimmesdale exhibits his masochistic pain to the full in his closet, to the "ever wakeful one (eye) which had seen him in his closet, wielding the bloody scourge" (p.95).

Dimmesdale holds his contract in a masochistic way: in what method we know not, Dimmesdale marks in the flesh the same letter on his breast. The sign on Hester's clothe is a public one with its meaning as the contract hidden from all; and the secret one, in Dimmesdale's flesh, sensed by readers through the hints given by the author, and then discovered by Chillingworth and finally revealed to all at Dimmesdale's death. Hester seldom exercises her power directly except for commanding Dimmesdale to help her keep Pearl "Speak thou for me" (p.72), and persuading Dimmesdale to leave with her to Europe, while Chillingworth, who seizes the power granted by the contract by sneaking into Dimmesdale's bedroom and uncovering his bosom, executes this power to the extreme. Because he is not the safe torturer Dimmesdale picked for himself, his punishment is no longer safe for Dimmesdale and consequently threatens Dimmesdale's masochistic fantasy. Chillingworth functions as the "Greek" in Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, destroying the masochistic dream by trying to bring back the reality in reminding Dimmesdale constantly of his sinful flesh.

Dimmesdale's fantasy of omnipotence and salvation from his own God is the drive of his masochism, and the suffering is the precondition to his pleasure at the last moment. After his last sermon, Dimmesdale climbs on the scaffold, dissolving the contract between him and Hester by revealing it to all, in this way Chillingworth in consequence loses the position as his torturer. At his death, Hester pleads for a meeting in heaven, but Dimmesdale refuses her, for the only time so clearly and cruelly: "The law we broke I—the sin here awfully revealed! —let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear! It may be, that, when we forgot our God—when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul—it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion." (Hawthorne 168) Without the effect of the contract, Hester means no more than fellow-sinner and shame for him, thus the refusal is easy to utter. And his last words, "God knows; and He is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost for ever! Praised be His name! His will be done! Farewell!" (pp.168-169) This confession is solely between him and his God. The dismissing of Hester is for giving her place back to the almighty torturer, his own God. This is the Law he sets for himself, and he turns all the afflictions he receives into His command and mercy, preconditions of His salvation. In his fantasy, he is satisfied in the delayed pleasure of being purified, and eventually redeemed in extreme agony. This public confession is his last performance of masochism, and confessing in the last few minutes virtually makes him escape public condemnation. What is more, this confession, immediately after his most successful sermon, does not show the proper effect, perhaps for Dimmesdale never reveal any details or firm truth of his sin in words. Once again he perform succeeds, like every time in his sermon he tells people that he is "utterly a pollution and a lie" (p.92) and people only respect him more, some people stubbornly defends for his reputation, and "denied that there was any mark whatever on his breast, more than on a new-born infant's" (p.170).

Dimmesdale's masochistic suffering is a performance which he cannot throw off if he wants to maintain his public face, and what Dimmesdale wants is not just public face. Masochism is not merely a means for Dimmesdale to hide in a subordinate position in order to escape public humiliation and punishment, but also a design for him to achieve divinity——since he has sinned in "love" with Hester, Dimmesdale should have known that he is denied

the opportunity of moral purity if he does not confess. The first stage of self-knowledge is recognition of his degradation——that's why Christian doctrine emphasizes confession. In order to maintain his public position and moral purity both, Dimmesdale invents his masochistic play, through which Dimmesdale suffers physically and spiritually, and consequently convinces himself that he is purified and also seizes the power of penetration into the inner heart of sinners, which is pivotal to his status in Puritan church. Though begin in a condemned position, Dimmesdale converts suffering from the sequel of sin into the precondition of self-knowledge, understanding, and salvation; he expects to transfer his sin into his advantage. However, this conceptual conversion is fragile, incapable of shaking the Puritan world. Not like Robert Audley who returns to the position the patriarchal society appointed to him, Dimmesdale has nowhere to go back but is obliged to stay in his omnipotent fantasy, where he is relatively safe and powerful (even though the threaten of reality never stops and does hurt him). Dimmesdale never confess to the Puritan God, in stead, he confesses to his own God, who is all the way supreme, and can never be negated by Dimmesdale. Masochism for Dimmesdale is more than a disguise or a ruse for power, but a way of living, for he has no courage or power either to accept the reality or to reject it——only masochism provides him a place to hide from it. Dimmesdale's suffering cannot ennoble him, and is not beautiful at all, but a pitiable misery, a predicament he largely chooses for himself, in which he gradually loses himself. Dimmesdale is left further and further from what he is seeking, a dreamer knowing not that he is daydreaming.

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