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Motherhood Makes a Matriarchy

Lily Mann
sandra.mann@otterbein.edu

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Abstract

This analysis will discuss the topic of matriarchies, how they created, and how they are sustained. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, and Ryan Murphy’s *American Horror Story: Coven* are used as examples of matriarchies, wherein Hawthorne’s matriarchy is at its start, whereas Murphy’s matriarchy is coming to a potential end. This will be examined through a comparative analysis between the characters in Hawthorne’s early American work with the characters in Murphy’s contemporary work. Ultimately, Hawthorne’s matriarchy is much more insidious and potentially damaging to a patriarchal norm than Murphy’s reclusive patriarchy. Hawthorne’s matriarchy has the option to disrupt a patriarchal structure from within. Murphy’s matriarchy simply re-uses the tools of a patriarchy to maintain order, and thus doesn’t really disrupt the larger social structures at play.
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Mothers. Nearly everybody has got at least one. If that mother also happens to have a female identifying child, then there is the opportunity for a matriarchy. Or at least that is how things look when one looks at *The Scarlet Letter* and *American Horror Story: Coven*. In each, a mother-daughter duo works towards a matriarchy. In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, the matriarchy is at its very beginning. Alternatively, in Ryan Murphy’s *American Horror Story: Coven*, the matriarchy is on the verge of collapse. Chronologically, one could imagine them being at opposite ends of the same thread, as Hawthorne’s work, though set in 1642, was published in 1850, and Murphy’s work wrapped in early 2014. The shift in form from a written text to a television program can also be explained by this opposite ends of the timeline theory, as the public has moved, at least somewhat, from a paper format to a screen one. So, if Murphy’s matriarchy is an advancement of the one created by Hawthorne 150 years prior, wouldn’t things be more radical? It would follow that the matriarchy, having had time to grow and process, would develop in a way that is more radical, and pushing more against the patriarchal structure surrounding them.

The following experiment will show that Ryan Murphy’s *American Horror Story: Coven* is not more radical than Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. In fact, Hawthorne’s work is inherently more radical, as Murphy’s work merely follows in the footsteps of Hawthorne’s matriarchy, and goes so far as to reinforce certain limitations like the value of a familial succession in a matriarchy over something less bounded by DNA. Murphy’s matriarchy also follows a more separatist vision of a matriarchy, wherein the entire system functions outside a patriarchal influence, and where men have extremely limited participation. Hawthorne’s matriarchy exists as
a more integrated structure with in a Puritan patriarchy, and thus causes more radical moves than a separatist structure could provide.

Initially the analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Ryan Murphy’s *American Horror Story: Coven* was to show that women who defy societal norms will always be othered, and the ways that that othering has changed in terms of the words used to label them, ie witch to bitch. This will be examined through a comparative analysis between the characters in Hawthorne’s early American work with the characters in Murphy’s contemporary work. These women are defiant in that they defy societal norms like gender roles, sexual practices, and parental roles. A broader understanding of the role of deviant women in literature and it’s implications on the cultures that created the works will be gained. The plan was to use the language of ‘witch to bitch’ in that witch hunts of the 1690s have become the labeling of women as ‘bitches’ as a new way of othering.

The problem is that Hester Prynne, the main character in Hawthorne’s 1850 masterpiece, is not a witch. Her daughter, Pearl, while incredibly supernatural, is also not a witch. Nor are Reverend Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, Reverend Wilson, or Governor Bellingham. The only witch in the entire novel is Mistress Hibbins, Governor Bellingham’s sister. She only appears a few brief times throughout the novel, mostly to remind the reader that the Puritans were hypocrites in that the Governor’s sister was a witch and no one really did anything about it (Hawthorne). The other problem is that almost everyone in Murphy’s 2014 work is a witch, save for two male characters who serve, literally, as waitstaff to the Coven. The move from ‘witch to bitch’ suddenly looks more like a move from ‘bitch to witch’, except Hawthorne never used that
sort of language, and Murphy’s matriarch, Fiona, self identifies as a ‘witch-bitch’(Murphy).

Sinner to witch-bitch? The analysis was quickly devolving, and thus everyone headed back to the
drawing board.

There, on the metaphorical table, was the reoccurring theme of motherhood and
matriarchies. Hester’s motherhood is what drives the entire plot of *The Scarlet Letter*, in that her
sin is motherhood outside the confines of a marriage. Cordelia’s function in *American Horror
Story: Coven* as temporary mother to the next generation of witches, as well as Fiona’s lack of
mothering toward her daughter, Cordelia, features in the discovery of the Coven’s next matriarch
and next Supreme. Add in every other echo that exists between the two texts, and this exploration
was born.

Research into witches to cultivate an understanding of the fictional history of the Coven,
and where the world of Hester Prynne would go within sixty years led to a broader understanding
of how accused witches in the 1690s were like Hester and the Coven in that they were often
outsiders, and persecuted for holding perceived power that was not meant to be accessible to
outsiders. For example, the first three women accused were Tituba, a slave, Sarah Good, a
homeless woman, and Sarah Osbourne, an impoverished older woman (Mather). The girls who
accused them were everything the accused were not: white, upper class, young. To be accused of
witchcraft was to be accused of living outside the societal norm. Living outside the societal norm
needed to be punished in order to uphold said standard. Salem needed a scapegoat, and found it
in the devil’s witches.

Witches became synonymous with what was wrong in Puritans: those who weren’t
Puritans. The witch was considered “the anti-housewife, threatening the domain who were
responsible first for bearing and raising children, and second, for maintaining a well-kept
household” (Natrella 13). By refusing to play by their societally informed station and role, the
above women, and all accused of witchcraft, threatened the social order and domain of the good
Puritan housewife and mother.

A key thing to note here, is that the majority of people accused of witchcraft were
women, dating all the way back to the fourteen century in Essex, England. Prior to this date,
records of who was accused of murder versus murder via witchcraft are unclear, even though
historians know witches were accused as early as 597 in the court of King Aethelbehrt of Kent
(Cawthorne 15). So really, the most disruptive in terms of the social domain are those who are
already outside the social order. The most dangerous, and thus those that were accused and
executed for witchcraft, were already outsiders. Outsiders that could usurp the social order, and
thus take power away from those in power, are the most dangerous, at least in the eyes of those
accusing the witches.

So outsiders that disrupt the social order needs to be exiled or excluded in some way so
as to not completely destroy the social order. But what happens if those who are exiled continue
to disrupt the social order by created an entirely new social order? What if that social order
coexists within the larger social order? What if that new social order separates entirely by
choice? What if the exiled choose exile before they can be formally exiled? The alternate social
order, in this analysis, is a matriarchy in contrast with a traditional patriarchy. For Nathaniel
Hawthorne, the matriarchy is just at its start, in that Hester is disrupting a social order that
condemns her as a sinner. Her daughter, Pearl, grows up as evidence of Hester’s sin, and only
knows herself as daughter of Hester, rather than daughter of exile. Hawthorne provides and
example of what the beginning of a matriarchal social order could look like, and how it could disrupt entirely the patriarchal social order that inadvertently created it. For Ryan Murphy, the matriarchy is crumbling and in disrepair. The matriarch, Fiona, has gained so much power from within that exiled social order that she abandons the separatist ways to exert force of the normative patriarchal structure. Left in her place is a distinct absence of matriarch, and others scramble to fill in until the next matriarch makes herself known. Everyone in the Coven understands herself as both exile and exalted. They are exiled from a normative culture that doesn’t quite understand how they function. They are exalted from within their separatist culture for potentially being the next matriarch. Murphy provides an image of what the potential end of a matriarchy could look like, if the matriarchal structure isn’t secure.

Ultimately, Hawthorne’ matriarchy is the one with an uncertain future, as he leaves it open ended. The reader can’t be quite sure that Pearl goes on to rebel in the ways that her mother did in Puritan Massachusetts. Murphy’s matriarchy is secured and is stronger than ever with Cordelia, Fiona’s daughter, at the helm. Cordelia’s coven has grown exponentially, and the future is assured to be a prosperous one. The interesting part, especially for this work, is that the Coven matriarchy functions away from normative society. In this way, Murphy’s coven is less radical than Hawthorne’s mother-daughter duo, because Hawthorne’s characters actively push back and disrupt the structure that exiled them. Murphy’s characters just separate and exist away from those that exiled them.

As for organization, the essay follows in a few separate sections. The first section is an introduction to the primary texts. Those texts, as previously mentioned, are Nathaniel
Hawthorne’s 1850 work *The Scarlet Letter*, and Ryan Murphy’s 2014 *American Horror Story: Coven*. A plot description is provided for each text, as well as a deeper context for both works. Hawthorne’s writing in 1850 about something that happened two hundred years prior is explained in terms of his familial sins that led to his writing *The Scarlet Letter*. The difference in form is also discussed, as Murphy’s work plays on the screen in the same way Hawthorne’s functioned on the page.

The second section delves into the fascination with maternity that crosses both texts. Hester’s maternity as both divine and filled with sin is key in terms of understanding why Hester is exiled in the first place, and how it provides her the space to create a matriarchy that continues to disrupt the society that deems her a sinner. The sheer number of mothers or attempted mothers in Murphy’s text is enough to warrant its own section, what with Fiona being biological mother to Cordelia, Cordelia being mother in action to the next generation of witches, and Myrtle functioning as surrogate mother to Cordelia. The changing mothers creates the necessary instability in the matriarchy to lead it to near ruin.

The third section is more direct analysis on Pearl and the double she has in Cordelia. This doubling creates a firm connection between the world of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s tale of sin and guilt with Ryan Murphy’s exploration of oppression and secrecy. Cordelia is a direct link in many cases to Pearl, even though their mothers do not function as echos of one another. This not only prevents *American Horror Story: Coven* from being seen as *The Scarlet Letter 2: The Frayed Family*. Both function similarly as the future of the matriarchy, as well as in other ways, like seeking a physical emblem of the matriarchy to mark them as successor.
The final section, prior to the conclusion, is on the fascination with inheritance in both texts. Neither Cordelia or Pearl would exist without their mothers, and thus inherit some form of legacy. Both Murphy and Hawthorne push that legacy further, as Cordelia and Pearl both inherit from someone other than the matriarch. Inheritance from the current matriarch comes in terms of social power, while inheritance from outside provides the leverage for Cordelia and Pearl to use that social power. Cordelia replaces her mother, Fiona, as matriarch (Murphy). Pearl becomes the richest person in the New World (Hawthorne). Inheritance both explains and complicates the matriarchy in the ways that it can rebel against becoming patriarchal.

Witches are certainly not a novel concept in today’s society. What quickly comes to mind are things like Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, pointy black hats, and cauldrons filled with smoking liquids. A more critical memory might recall Salem’s infamous trials that occurred in the seventeenth century and the religious implications. The witch gets invoked in phrases like ‘witch hunts’ when one is attempting to find the traitor within a group, especially when no traitor actually exists. This work, however, is meant to be a different take on the witch. The focus is slanted toward a look at who is getting labeled as outsider and as other, and how those indictments can in turn give power to disrupt the labeling social order. Hester, Cordelia, Pearl, Fiona, Myrtle, Mistress Hibbins, and a whole host of other characters get labeled as outsider in *The Scarlet Letter* and *American Horror Story: Coven*. In being othered, each of these women gains a sort of power to create a new social structure, a new society where the normative is the other.
If anything, my Honors experience has taught me to look at what is normative, what is not normative, and theorize what might happen if the two were switched. This project comes as a culmination of my Otterbein experience, combining my love for the non normative, a fascination with early American literature, and a value to understand the ways that gender roles can influence the ways people interact. I’ve been circling this idea of radical maternity since my first class that involved a discussion on monstrous motherhood involving Euripides’ *Medea*. When considering texts, however, I knew I couldn’t delve into mythology without wanting, to paraphrase a classmate, to rip my eyelashes out. Instead, I turned toward another curiosity: women as social deviants, specifically as witches and early American literature. *The Scarlet Letter* showed exactly how radical mothers could be. In contrast, *American Horror Story: Coven* showed how potentially radical mothers were de-radicalized by playing into the same patriarchal hierarchies they originally meant to dismantle. The project has served as a way to combine my two camps, that of the English Literary Studies and the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, into research and analysis of something I wasn’t all that comfortable with when I began this project: the value of the work.

The value of the Honors Program has been called into question numerous times, especially for someone majoring in the humanities. For someone not going on to graduate school in the field associated with the project, those questions are amplified and doubled. Along the way, numerous members of the Honors community have left to pursue something that to them felt more meaningful in terms of where they wanted to end up, whether that be a different style of project, or no project at all. At some point, I’ve probably asked every person in my life as to whether this, meaning an Honors experience, would be worth it. Undoubtedly yes, it has been
worth it. Getting to work with the incredibly talented professors in the specialized courses and getting to know my incredibly passionate peers in the program has made the experience worth it. This I know for certain.

As to the value of my specific work, the answers are still coming in. After graduation, I’ll be attending law school with the goal of eventually working in criminal justice, serving marginalized communities. I can’t imagine that Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne will feature in any of the casework, nor can I imagine the question of the succession of a fictional supernatural matriarchy, like the one in Murphy’s American Horror Story: Coven coming into play. The metaphysical ideas in both texts, however, tie directly into that work as an attorney. Hester is criminalized for her behavior in loving a man and giving birth to a child against societal norms. The Coven’s council serves as a form of judiciary, though incredibly biased and partisan. Looking at these texts as possibilities that will arise in a criminal law career is another way that this project will provide value to my understanding as an attorney of the clients who are criminalized for going against societal norms, and how to work in a judiciary that is, and always has been, somewhat biased.

My only wish for this work is that in the future, some poor Honors student will be assigned the same task I was, and be sent to the third floor of Courtright to find a project to read. I hope the title will grab their eye, and they will read my project. To wish that they will like it seems like a stretch, so I will only wish that they finish it. I wish this work will show that someone else has done it. Someone else wrote thirty plus pages in two years on a subject that doesn’t seem to directly relate to their future endeavors. Someone else made that subject matter,
at least for a little while. Then this essay can go back to gathering dust until the next Honors student needs a little confidence boost. I did it, and so can you.

Before I send this little piece of my heart off into the world to be read, I’d like to thank the people that have been crucial to this work. A huge thank you the incredible Honors faculty here at Otterbein, specifically Dr. Frick, Dr. Tansey, and Dr. Patridge. Thank you to Dr. Birk and Dr. Ashworth for joining me for this adventure. I also thank my Residence Life Family and my loving group of friends for listening to me rant and rave about witches and matriarchies, and nodding at the appropriate times.

Finally, I would like to thank the matriarchs in my life: Rose Mann, Tiffany Peters, and Sandra Trunck. Thank you for raising me to be the person I am. And now, on with the show.
Introduction

The United States, from the moment settlers from Europe arrived in the ‘New World’, has, and continues to be, a patriarchy. The majority of political and social leaders are men. Men, specifically white men, get paid significantly more for the same types of work, whether that be managerial tasks or acting. While women do continue to make strides for more a egalitarian world, some women have seceded completely from American culture, and have formed their own societies that fit a more matriarchal structure. One such individual is Winnie. Winnie Adams is a seventy five year old self described “radical feminist separatist lesbian”, she lives in a matriarchal structure called Alpine in Alabama (Kershaw). Alpine arose out of the lesbian separatist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, during the height of the second wave of feminism. Winnie Adams, who married a man, had two kids, and lived the heterosexual American dream, but found that it didn’t fit with who she was. So in 1999, she sold her home and moved to Alpine, which has a strict lesbians only policy. Her daughters aren’t allowed to live with her, as they do not identify as lesbians. For Adams, lesbian separatism is the way to combat and deal with a patriarchal structure. Adams stated in an interview in 2009, “To me, this is the real world…I say, ‘It’s another glorious day on the mountain.’ Men are violent. The minute a man walks in the dynamics change immediately, so I choose not to be around those dynamics” (Kershaw). Here, men are oversimplified to one characteristic, and exiled from their ‘glorious’ feminist utopia.

Despite Adams’ idealism, Alpine isn’t the feminist utopia one might imagine from this separatist movement. Alpine and separatist communes like it are struggling to maintain membership as older women die, and younger women don’t join. The reason? Andrea Gibbs-
Henson, of another separatist commune in Massachusetts states, “The bottom line is the world is too diverse. The whole idea of a feminist utopia, it’s just an ideal. We would not survive here if all we did was cater to lesbian separatists” (Kershaw). Still, the political and personal promise of a matriarchal world remains seductive. Can matriarchies nurture stronger, more empowering relationships between women? Are they more democratic and liberating?

These questions animate both historical and contemporary matriarchal narratives, including Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Ryan Murphy’s *American Horror Story: Coven*. In Hawthorne’s work, Hester Prynne creates a matriarchal structure within a patriarchy, and his novel is ultimately more radical than its twenty first century counterpart. In Coven, the matriarchal system is crumbling due to dwindling numbers, and the future is unclear. In connecting the characters in these two pieces, this essay will illustrate the ways that the matriarchy has moved from Hawthorne’s incipient matriarchy to Murphy’s crumbling matriarchy. Hawthorne’s matriarchy, as created by Hester, is much more radical than the one sustained in Murphy’s *American Horror Story: Coven*. In a close study of character, this essay will analyze women’s agency, power, and relationships in a matriarchal structure. Hester achieves more autonomy and more intimacy with her daughter than the women in Coven. In the next generation of matriarchs, Pearl has more anarchical power than Cordelia.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne explores the themes of guilt, sin, and punishment. Those themes haunted Hawthorne due to his familial connections to the seventeenth century witch hunts. In the fictional work, Hester Prynne, the main character and blossoming matriarch, is branded with the scarlet letter ‘A’ for her adultery in 1642. The brand exists as an ornate letter embroidered on her clothing. Hester refuses to confess her co-conspirator, and thus the resulting
child, Pearl, is fatherless. Reverend Dimmesdale, the secret father, suffers in silence, haunted by his sin and slowly descends into a sort of madness with the assistance of Hester’s husband, Roger Chillingworth. The Puritans reject Hester as sinner, so she and Pearl live on the edges of Puritan society, persisting as the constant reminder of sin can often do in a Puritan realm.

Throughout the text, Pearl pushes Dimmesdale to claim their family, but his need to remain chaste in the eyes of his congregation prevents him from doing so. Eventually, the weight of his sin causes Dimmesdale to climb upon the scaffold and confess his connection to Hester and Pearl, and he dies. Hester goes on to become more of a solace to other women in the community. Chillingworth dies and leaves his entire estate to Pearl, making her the wealthiest person in the New World. Beyond that, Pearl’s future is unknown. Hester dies and is buried in a separate grave next to Dimmesdale, though they share a headstone that reminds passerby of their sin. It is important to note that neither Hester nor Pearl are outright described as witches. Pearl is often described in supernatural ways, but is not a witch.

Ryan Murphy’s *American Horror Story: Coven* examines a matriarchy on the brink of collapse. Murphy’s tale, which aired in late 2013 and early 2014, examines a coven of witches housed at Ms. Robichaux’s Academy in New Orleans. The latest crop of witches is incredibly small, and being led by Cordelia, a relatively weak witch and the current Supreme’s daughter. The matriarch and Supreme, Fiona, has abandoned the Coven to live her own life, and only returns when she realizes that the next is Supreme rising, and her own life will come to the end shortly. Myrtle, Fiona’s rival from their own days at Ms. Robichaux’s Academy, steps in to assist the transition, especially after the Coven starts to crumble from within. After surviving threats from the outside by witch hunters, Murphy surprises the audience with the fact that
Cordelia is the next Supreme, and she ascends to power. The Coven expands exponentially under her tutelage, as Cordelia opens the Academy to the media and does away with the secrecy that the witches had formerly lived under. In Murphy’s work, nearly everyone is a witch. The only characters that aren’t are Spaulding, a butler, and Kyle, who becomes the butler after Spaulding’s death.

Maternity

With those histories in mind, it is important to see that what connects the two texts is a focus and fascination with maternity. Though Hester is more Magdalene than Mary in the eyes of the Puritans, Hawthorne is quick to note that to an outsider, Hester is the perfect image of divine maternity. As Hester suffers her punishment on the scaffold, Hawthorne writes, “had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman… the image of Divine Maternity… of that sacred image of sinless motherhood” (Hawthorne 48). The figurative outsider, a Papist, becomes the one who could see the beautiful maternity that Hester embodies, in her sin. In another context, Hester would’ve been exalted, along with her illegitimate child. Instead, Hester has “the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life” (Hawthorne 48). She had a child with someone who was not her husband. Whether Hester is an example as divine or fallen mother, maternity defines Hester. Hester is painfully visible as a mother, from the very beginning.

In addition, the narrative insists that we see Pearl as a fatherless child. Pearl’s bastardization makes Hester not simply mother, but also matriarch. This lack of legitimate fatherhood leads Hester to then state that her child “must seek a heavenly Father; she shall never know an earthly one!” (Hawthorne 58). Of course, the entire plot focuses on Hester Prynne not
revealing the father at this juncture. Hawthorne drives the narrative of Pearl’s hidden father with the issue of Hester being punished for this sin, while the father, the Reverend Dimmesdale, is haunted internally by the sin he has committed in the eyes of the Puritan church. Ultimately, Pearl’s fatherlessness puts her outside a mortal patriarchy and solely within a matriarchy. This is most evident later when the Governor, Mr. Wilson, questions Pearl about her origins. Hawthorne writes, “Pearl knew well enough who made her; for Hester Prynne, the daughter of a pious home, very soon after her talk with the child about her Heavenly Father, had begun to inform her of those truths…” (Hawthorne 93). Pearl has only known a religious father, the Puritan god, rather than an earthly human father. With no father, she thus exists outside a mortal patriarchal influence. Furthermore, Pearl responds to Mr. Wilson’s question with an announcement that “she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door” (93). Like Athena from Zeus, Pearl knows herself to be only Hester’s progeny, without the influence of any man on her creation. Pearl is the product of Hester’s maternity, her matriarchal object.

This juxtaposition of Pearl as both heavenly child and daughter of sin also puts Hester outside a worldly control. Although she is punished for her lawlessness, she is also praised as being incredibly strong and virtuous. In the call for Hester to speak the father’s name, and therefore condemn the unknown father to punishment, Reverend Mr. Wilson states, “Woman, transgress not beyond the limits of Heaven’s mercy!… That little babe hath been gifted with a voice, to second and confirm the counsel which thou hast heard. Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast” (58). Hester is already pushing the boundaries of the Puritans’ mercy by continuing to live and exist in proximity to the Puritans.
Not condemning her co-conspirator exacerbates that sin in the eyes of Reverend Mr. Wilson. In contrast, Hester is exalted by the other minister of the town, Mr. Dimmesdale, who states “Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman’s heart! She will not speak!” (Hawthorne 59). Dimmesdale’s comment is colored in retrospect by the fact that he is the earthly father, whom is kept out of the line of punishment through Hester’s silence. Pearl, as Hester’s daughter, is otherworldly, and therefore makes Hester otherworldly too.

Cordelia enters similarly as mother figure, though less Mary and more Mrs. Brady. In her first introduction, Cordelia introduces herself as “Cordelia Foxx, headmistress. Alright girls, there’s a van full of groceries in the driveway that needs unloading. I’ll show Zoe to her room, and then we meet for midday gathering. Let’s go,” (see Figure 1). In delivering the set of domestic instructions, Cordelia functions as the girls’ mother. She also steps in when the others begin to torment the newest arrival, and sets them on a schedule. Cordelia’s tone here is warm, and she prompts the girls the way one might send out children to carry on with chores. The call to get the groceries from the vehicle references that the coven lives together, more a family than a modern school structure. Even though the house maintains a butler, the girls are still expected to contribute to the chores of upkeep and maintaining the household. Ultimately, Cordelia is no Hester in that she hasn’t just given birth. Cordelia isn’t subject to communal census and punishment for sexual sin. She isn’t presented as an icon of celestial maternity. In spite of all this, Cordelia is established as surrogate mother, as she mothers in word and action.
Similarly, the examples of motherhood in *American Horror Story: Coven* ghosts its fathers. Fiona Goode never reveals who Cordelia’s father is, and Cordelia never mentions him. Myrtle, who acts as Cordelia’s mother figure when she is sent to Ms. Robichaux’ academy, also runs the academy as a matriarchal structure with no visible father figures. The shot that captures Cordelia’s arrival reinforces Myrtle’s status as surrogate mother and Coven as matriarchy. An aerial shot depicts a child being delivered into another guardianship (See Fig. 2). Myrtle, standing on the edge of the steps leading into the academy, faces the Mother and daughter as they approach the academy. Myrtle, with her bright red hair and black dress, matches the color scheme of Fiona’s clothing. Fiona’s garb is both red and black. In contrast, Cordelia is wears bright white and a brown jumper. This distinction shows that the battle between Fiona and Myrtle, as established by their feud of over the supremacy, is not over. And yet neither mother
really connects to Cordelia. The only other thing in the scene that matches Cordelia is the white stone of the Academy itself, foreshadowing her leadership role. The long shot on the diminutive characters evidences how deep and large the history of the Coven is, and that these three women are players in a much larger act. Another key aspect in this scene is the sharp, clean lines that surround them. The street is just out of view, depicting that the only path for Cordelia and Fiona is forward, into the academy. They are visibly trapped, by the edge of the frame, the hedges, and Myrtle. Fiona’s hand on Cordelia’s back, propelling her forward, also shows the active part Fiona has played, and will continue to play, in the yet-timid Cordelia’s life. Myrtle’s hands hang limply at her sides, not in an outstretched posture of welcoming which one might expect.

Less than a minute later, Myrtle solidifies verbally her role as Cordelia’s secondary mother. Via voiceover, Myrtle reminds Cordelia about the beginnings of their relationship, in
which Cordelia asked, “will you be my mother now?”, (Murphy). Myrtle and Cordelia, standing in the hall, are dwarfed by the overbearing manor, and framed within the gothic architecture. To the right, a painting of one of the former Supremes is visible. Cordelia leans slightly toward Myrtle. Myrtle, instead of comforting the crying Cordelia, raises a hand to her sunglasses, and not out to Cordelia. When she does reach out a gloved hand, Cordelia doesn’t take it. This distinct lack of connection serves as a direct contrast to Fiona’s hand in the previous shot, which is on Cordelia’s back. Myrtle’s outstretched hand acts as the response to Cordelia’s question. Myrtle offers to be Cordelia’s mother, at least for her time at the academy, without a word. The new mother becomes the ideal mother, and the biological mother becomes the evil one, parodying a traditional motherhood narrative (Lopes 119). While physically not what is demonstrated in the scene visually, it is supported via the dialogue.

This visually seamless transition from one mother to another seems to contradict Hester’s powerful connection to motherhood. When Hester’s motherhood is threatened, via the Governors, all of whom fear that Pearl can’t possibly be raised well as the product of sin, Hester demands, “God gave me the child!… Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me too! See ye not, she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a million-fold the power of retribution for my sin? Ye shall not take her! I will die first!” (Hawthorne 94). Hester recognizes Pearl as both her reason for her punishment, and also her punishment. Pearl serves as her own version of the scarlet letter, consistently reminding her mother of the sin Hester committed, and that her father has not yet been identified. In an analysis of the interconnections within The Scarlet Letter, Dr. J. Kumar calls Pearl “a special gift from God which is meant for a blessing
and a retribution that are more effective than the scarlet letter” (Kumar 105). Pearl exists as both gift, blessing upon the illicit union between her mother and father, as well as a reminder that the union was illicit, and banned by the Puritans. Simultaneously, Hester acknowledges that Pearl is necessary for Hester’s own existence. Her role as mother has superseded all other commitments, and exists as her own reason for existence. Hester would cease to exist without Pearl.

Murphy takes the exact opposite approach, wherein Fiona ceases to exist because of Cordelia’s existence. The supreme begins to lose power as the new supreme comes into her own, which leads to a succession of one supreme for the next. In the case of Cordelia and Fiona, Fiona loses her powers as Cordelia gains them, since Cordelia is the next Supreme. This is noted in the final episode of the series, wherein Fiona acknowledges that her power began to slip away as soon as Cordelia was born. The audience is then given the view of the first real hug between mother and daughter (See Figure 3). The upward angle on the two suggests a child’s point of view. Cordelia, now the stronger, holds Fiona upright, and Fiona’s arms aren’t visible in the frame. The room is dimly lit from below. Lamps, just out of view in the bottom left, and bottom right corners provide the only semblance of light. Because of Fiona’s placement, her face remains in shadow, whereas Fiona’s is lit. Fiona’s face, however, is the only one visible in this frame. Her now haggard appearance contrasts with the paintings of the previous Supremes that fill the wall behind them. Like Pearl, Cordelia only exists because her mother exists. Without Hester, there would be no Pearl. The matriarchy continues to function due to the existence of the mother.
Pearl’s Double

Pearl’s existence in *The Scarlet Letter* functions as an interrogation of the expectations of women in early Salem. Pearl is the antithesis of everything the Puritans want in their society. She’s the product of an extramarital affair, evidence of the downfall of a promising young minister and a married woman left alone. Pearl and her mother are ostracized from their society, and therefore Pearl has the opportunity to grow up outside that Puritan culture. In existing outside the culture, Pearl has the ability to critique the Puritans in ways that they are not able to critique themselves.

First, one must understand Pearl in order to see her counterpart in Cordelia. Pearl is dressed by her mother in “the richest tissues that could be procured, and allowed her imaginative faculty its full playin the arrangement and decoration of the dresses which the child
wore” (Hawthorne 75). Like the decorative nature of her “A”, Hester has dressed and treats her as a treasure, rather than something to be despised. This dressing of Pearl in such rich clothing suggests that Hester is attempting to cover up “the sins of her parents” (Daniels 229). Further, Hawthorne describes Pearl as “worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of the angels, after the world’s first parents were driven out” (Hawthorne 74). Again, Hester is portrayed as a biblical mother, this time as Eve. This is again furthered at the end of the novel in Hester’s death, as the letter ‘A’ is carved into the shared tombstone, “having undergone a transformation from ‘adultery’ to Adam’s first disobedience to ‘ability’, thus giving the symbol a ‘plurisignitive’ importance” (Kumar 111). Hester and Dimmesdale act as the original parents and created Pearl through sin. Though Pearl exists as the product of sin, Hawthorne states that she is far more pure than the ‘first parents’ cast out of Eden. In doing so, Pearl is a contradiction, both existing as the biblical savior and also the downfall of humanity.

The contradiction is furthered in a discussion of Pearl’s demeanor. Hawthorne writes,

“her nature appears to possess depth, too, as well as variety; but- or else Hester’s fears deceived her- it lacked reference and adaptation to the world into which she was born. The child could not be made amenable to rules. In giving her existence, a great law had been broken, and the result was a being, whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder; or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst with the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered” (Hawthorne 75).

Pearl’s existence defies the law, as having born into a Puritan culture. As she was born outside of the law, the laws don’t seem to apply to her. Therein, Pearl has the ability to critique the Puritans around her. Her elements of beauty and brilliance do not exist in the correct order because the elements were created outside of Puritan society, and therefore do not have to follow Puritan
rules of order. Pearl is also impossible to ‘discover’, meaning Pearl’s nature looks much like the new world, wild and unconquerable.

This wild nature is attributed to Pearl’s unborn soul being a battleground for Hester’s soul. Hester recalls a state while she was pregnant wherein Pearl was gaining a soul through Hester, wherein Hester is a medium, and “however white and clear originally, they had taken the deep stains of crimson and gold, the fiery lustre, the black shadow, and the untempered light… the warfare of Hester’s spirit, at that epoch, was perpetuated in Pearl” (Hawthorne 75). Pearl’s soul is tainted by the sins of her mother, since Pearl’s soul must travel through Hester to reach Pearl. Hester was having a crisis of faith when she pregnant with Pearl, and that crisis of faith is written in Pearl’s soul. This confusion within Pearl’s soul allows her to sway from the pure whiteness of a child’s soul to the dark, stained soul of an adult sinner. Pearl’s soul is a battleground, and therefore wild.

Pearl is not only wild, but also implied to be supernatural. Hawthorne describes a certain look that would occasionally cross Pearl’s face that would lead Hester to wonder if her child was even human. The look itself is described as “so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits” (Hawthorne 76). Pearl’s marked soul, in combination with the pureness of a child’s, is perverse, in that is both goodhearted and also seeking the worst. This look of perversity leads Hester to question her daughter’s humanity, sometimes believing that Pearl was “rather an airy sprite… [that] would flit away with a mocking smile. Whenever that look appeared on her wild, bright deeply black eyes, it invested her with a strange remoteness and intangibility…” (Hawthorne 76). Pearl’s supernatural state as a sprite is evident through her intangibility, as well as her inability to be
tamed via the rules of Puritan society. Pearl’s ‘deeply black eyes’ could also be an abyss, into which Hester is staring.

Hester isn’t the only one to see Pearl as non-human. The Puritans of Salem see Pearl as “an imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants” (Hawthorne 77). Again, Pearl is an ‘imp’, meaning an evil sprite or fairy, rather than a human. Pearl also serves as a marker of her mother’s sin, like the embroidered ‘A’, rather than as a person. Here, Pearl loses her personhood and becomes object of sin, of corruption, of negative influence, rather than innocent result of her mother’s sin. The objectification also surrounds Pearl with a sort of protective boundary, described as “the destiny that had drawn an inviolable circle round her” (Hawthorne 77). Thus, she is both protected from the Puritans and kept out of the Puritan society. In this position, Pearl has no ties to bind her to Puritan ideologies or social standards. Her role as the perfect girl child, unfit to be around the children of Salem, also means that as an adult, she will not fit into the Puritan Salem, nor will she have to be “bound to the Puritan female code of conduct” (Daniels 229). Therefore, Pearl can move and seek things beyond what Puritan women can seek.

An example of this is that Pearl seeks a letter like her mother’s. One could assume this to be because Pearl does not understand the social meaning of her mother’s scarlet letter, but with the knowledge of Pearl’s supernatural intelligence visible in her look, one knows that Pearl understands what the letter means, and seeks it out anyway. The letter is what marks Pearl and Hester as outsider, and Pearl knows she is an outsider. To be an outsider means to have a power over those on the inside. While in the forest, the sunshine seems to avoid Hester. Pearl states, “It will not flee from me; for I wear nothing on my bosom yet!… Will not it come of its own accord,
when I am a woman grown?” (Hawthorne 152). Pearl assumes that her own letter will come when she is a “woman grown”. She welcomes the brand as a sign of maturity, wisdom, and power. Pearl knows the sunshine, representative of goodness, avoids her mother, and the reason is that her mother is marked with sin.

Furthermore, Pearl sees the sin in her father, Reverend Dimmesdale, prior to Pearl being informed of Dimmesdale’s status as her father. From afar, she equates Dimmesdale with the devil. Pearl asks, “but if it be the Black Man, will thou not let me stay a moment, and look at him, with his big book under his arm?” (Hawthorne 155). Hester responds with that the man approaching them is not the Black Man (read: devil), but the Reverend Dimmesdale. Pearl, thus seeing the man more clearly, still identifies the minister as someone who has signed the Black Man’s book and committed a sin. Pearl states, “And, mother, he has his hand over his heart! It is because, when the minister wrote his name in the book, the Black Man set his mark in that place? But why does he not wear it outside his bosom, as thou dost, mother?” (Hawthorne 115). Pearl recognizes Dimmesdale as a sinner like her mother, and guilty of the same sin as her mother, that sin being adultery. Hester hasn’t told Pearl that Dimmesdale is her father, and yet Pearl has a supernatural ability to know who her father is.

Similarly, Cordelia Foxx in *American Horror Story: Coven* looks and functions as a critique and subversion. Her character exposes the current Supreme’s faults and inability to serve her role in the matriarchy that is the Coven. Cordelia is everything the current Coven is not: kindhearted, seeker of unity rather than supremacy, and self-sacrificing for the good of the Coven. Cordelia is also unusual in the Coven, in that she is the daughter of the current Supreme, but does not serve on the leadership Council nor does she want to be the next Supreme. Her only
role is that of teacher, of which she is the only one. Cordelia is both within and outside the Coven as both teacher and of another generation than the other witches in the Coven. This role allows her to critique the Coven in the same way that Pearl can critique the Puritans.

The creation of Cordelia’s power also comes from her mother, as Pearl’s comes from Hester. In the final episode, when Cordelia confronts her dying mother, whom one author calls “the monster in all her closets” (Lopes 119). Fiona states, “You took my power the minute I gave birth to you…. every time I looked at you, I saw my own death. You were a constant reminder of my worst fears” (Murphy). Cordelia’s power is derived from Fiona’s power, just as Pearl’s stained soul is derived from Hester’s sins. Pearl is a reminder to Hester of Hester’s sin with Reverend Dimmesdale, and Cordelia is a reminder to Fiona of Fiona’s mortality. Thus the child represents both a joyous gift and also a horrible reminder.

One of the biggest connections between Pearl and Cordelia is that both can sense the sin of another. Pearl recognizes Dimmesdale’s sin from afar. Cordelia recognizes the sins of the other via touch. After being blinded in “Burn, Witch, Burn”, Cordelia is given the power to see one’s actions through touch. As she recovers, Cordelia sees the truth of her husband’s affair. Later, she sees that her mother wants to kill the entire Coven to hold on to her supremacy. Instead of an embroidered letter, this is represented by a black heirloom necklace from Fiona’s mother. In the scene, Fiona has just given to the necklace to Cordelia, as the necklace is symbolic of the power of the supremacy. In Cordelia’s vision, wherein she sees Fiona’s true desires, Fiona is seen yanking the necklace off Cordelia’s dead body. Instead of a directly confronting Fiona’s desire to murder her daughter, Cordelia shows her own desire to be like her mother by asking if there was a ring to go with the necklace. This mirroring of the mother’s image is similar to Pearl’s request
for a letter ‘A’ of her own. Here, both Cordelia and Pearl seek a power from their mother via a physical emblem that is representative of said power.

The assumption of power, however, is not the same. Cordelia’s power is distinctly downplayed, wherein Pearl’s is feared. In the first scene between Fiona, the current supreme, and her daughter, Fiona critiques Cordelia’s work and her abilities in botany. Cordelia notices that her mother looks jet-lagged, and offers to make a restorative potion. Fiona declines with, “Delia, with her potions and powders. One of my greatest disappointments in life is that you never fully realized the extent of your power.” (Murphy Ep 1). Despite the natural talent that Cordelia has shown in creating potions and botany important to the Coven, even the Supreme dismisses this work as not a talent worthy of her daughter. Of course, the audience won’t learn until the end of the season that the true extent of Cordelia’s power is the fullest extent of power possible for a witch, in that Cordelia is the next Supreme. While Pearl’s power is overestimated, ie the Puritan children fear that Pearl is an elf or sprite, Cordelia’s power is underestimated.

Inheritance

Pearl, and her counterpart, Cordelia, do not remain in the shadows of their mothers. Both, in their own rights, become a supreme in her own right. For Pearl, her inheritance comes not from her mother, but from her pseudo step-father, Roger Chillingworth. Chillingworth, having tried to destroy Pearl’s minister father, is described as having lost all purpose after the minister’s death. Hawthorne writes, “this unhappy man had made the very principle of his life to consist in the pursuit and systematic exercise of revenge;… there was no more devil’s work on earth for him to do” (Hawthorne 212). Again, Hawthorne makes it clear that Chillingworth is to play the role of a devil, attempting to torture Dimmesdale with the knowledge of his romantic
relationship with Hester. With no one to torment, Chillingworth loses his life purpose. His last act of disrupting Salem is to leave “a very considerable amount of property, both here and in England, to little Pearl, the daughter of Hester Prynne” (213). His executors were Governor Bellingham, the one who tried to take Pearl away from Hester, and Reverend Mr. Wilson, who oversaw Dimmesdale in his role as a minister.

Due to this inheritance, Pearl became one of the richest people in the New World. Hawthorne explains, “Pearl- the elf-child- the demon offspring.. became the richest heiress of her day…[and] at a marriageable period of her life, might have mingled her wild blood with the lineage of the devoutest Puritan among them all” (Hawthorne 213). Pearl- the outlaw, the wildest child, and the satanic presence in a puritan world- becomes the most marriageable woman. This legacy left by Chillingworth breaks with male inheritance and succession laws, amplifying Pearl’s position outside the Patriarchy (Wange 896). And yet the narrative is set in the conditional voice, meaning that Pearl’s potential for subversion may not be materialized. The reader never gets an ending to Pearl’s story: does she marry? Die at an early age? Remain single? Does she amass more wealth? Does she die destitute? Does she establish a matriarchy, or does she live as her mother did: alive within someone else’s patriarchy?

Pearl’s elusiveness makes her a more potent threat to patriarchy. Hester and Pearl initially disappear after the death of Chillingworth, and their story was like “a shapeless piece of driftwood cost ashore, with the initials of an ape upon it,… the story of the scarlet letter grew into legend. Its spell, however, was still potent, and kept the scaffold awful…” (Hawthorne 213). When Hester reappears, Pearl does not. Pearl remains like the driftwood, floating about. In a way, this adds to the mythology of Hester’s tale. Pearl could be anywhere, disrupting any
patriarchy, Puritan or otherwise. Pearl’s added power lies in that unknowing, in her potential ability to infiltrate another society that might not recognize her as daughter of the scarlet letter.

The narrative also obscures the fate of Pearl’s preternatural powers, reserving the possibility that she is never domesticated. Indeed, Hawthorne notes “none knew… whether the elf-child had gone thus untimely to a maiden grave; or whether her wild, rich nature had been softened and subdued, and made capable of a woman’s gentle happiness” (214). Pearl’s natural state is to be un-womanly, to be free and wild and supernatural. A Puritan lineage, which would be tainted by Pearl’s wild blood, would also have to subdue Pearl in order to make her capable of the correct form of happiness. More tellingly, the narrative juxtaposes the possibility of Pearl’s death with the prospect of marital surrender. Hester’s daughter- matriarchal, anarchic child- has to die before any patriarchy can take her down.

While Pearl’s future as a matriarch and supreme is left to ambiguity, Cordelia’s fate is explained clearly in the final installment of American Horror Story: Coven. At this point in the trials of the Seven Wonders, wherein the witches must complete a series of seven tasks to prove their abilities over the other witches, Misty and Zoe are believed dead, and Madison is the only one left standing in terms of those competing. Cordelia, having been blinded, never considered herself to be Supreme material, having always lived in the shadow of her mother and the Academy. Myrtle, Cordelia’s pseudo mother, and Cordelia meet after Madison has demanded the Supremacy, though having only performed five of the seven Wonders. As visible in the image, (See Figure 4), Cordelia is delegated to the bottom left corner of the frame. Dominating the frame is a portrait of a previous Supreme. This would seem to support Cordelia’s lack of belief that she is next Supreme. However, Cordelia’s head fits almost perfectly into a frame, covering
up the image of the actual supreme in the bottom left portrait. This image serves as a foreshadowing of the following conversation, wherein Myrtle reminds Cordelia that “you, Cordelia, you have royal blood in your veins… First, you were suppressed by your mother, then by your own theories. You have great power, my girl, power that has been seeking expression in these young vessels. But it's in you. You must let it out” (Murphy). Myrtle reminds Cordelia of her birthright, her matriarchal entitlement to power. Cordelia is the daughter of the previous Supreme. Bloodlines are supposed to have no bearing on the succession of the Supreme. Yet, as in the above image, Cordelia is destined to be the next Supreme. She need only believe in herself.

Figure 4, Cordelia’ Birthright, from Murphy, Ryan and Brad Fulchuk, creators. *American Horror Story: Coven*. FX, 2013.
Of course, Cordelia does believe in herself, completes the Seven Wonders, regains her eyesight, and seeks to bring the Coven into a new era of glory. Unlike the mystery that surrounds Pearl’s inheritance, Cordelia’s inheritance is clearly delineated. The final shot is a close up of Cordelia, framed by the stairs that dominate the main hall. On either side of the stairs, just out of view, is her council, composed of Queenie and Zoe. One of the new pupils asks what a Supreme is, and Queenie responds with, “you’re looking at her” (Murphy). Unlike Fiona’s introduction to the coven, Cordelia is backlit with her face toward the pupils and the camera, rather than her back being to the audience. The slight smile suggests that Cordelia knows a secret, a happy secret, and Queenie’s words have just reminded her of it. The house, in comparison, seems proportionate to Cordelia in this frame, in contrast to Figure 1. There, Cordelia is framed in the doorway, appearing larger than the surrounding furniture, but distant from the audience due to the shot length and her semi-closed body language. Here, Cordelia is more open, having fully reached her potential as the Supreme, and matriarch. Cordelia is no longer dwarfed by the mythology and history of the house. She now reigns Supreme.
Conclusion

Yes, Pearl’s supernatural power is overestimated. Hawthorne never directly states that Pearl is a witch, but she nevertheless changes Salem’s society, and has the future power of infiltrating a Patriarchal structure as referenced in Hawthorne’s epilogue of sorts. Cordelia, on the other hand, becomes leader of the witches in New Orleans, which is a step up in power from where she initially started as de facto leader. In terms of matriarchies, Hawthorne’s is more insidious in that it coexists inside and throughout the Puritan patriarchy of Salem, with Pearl infiltrating the patriarchy so much so that she is lost to Hawthorne’s history. Murphy’s matriarchy is insular, wherein the Supreme is expected to be from within the Coven, and ultimately is the biological daughter of the prior matriarch, which is even more insular than just
the assumption that the successor will be a pseudo daughter of the matriarch. The Coven only becomes sustainable with this insularity is broken, and the Coven is opened to the public.

In many ways, this question of insidiousness versus insularity is mirrored in Winnie Adams’ community in Alpine, Alabama. The separatist movement came to be as a way of protection, a way to exist without the threat of violence that was omnipresent in the patriarchal structure of the 1960s and 1970s. Murphy’s coven isolates similarly as a way to maintain safety in a world that is perceived to be hostile by witches. In contrast, the people who reject Alpine are more insidious in the patriarchal society of modern society, just as Hester and Pearl are insidious to the Puritan society that exiled them. The community at Alpine isolated against the violence, and ultimately has to choose to open itself to media attention in order to regain membership. The Coven works similarly, by performing an interview and speaking openly about the Coven’s existence. Hester and Pearl, on the other hand, are open from the very beginning, never hiding the scarlet mark of their difference. That openness, visible in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, is the more radical, and ultimately more effective, way of creating and sustaining a matriarchy than the more insidious, and ultimately more traditional, matriarchy present in Ryan Murphy’s *American Horror Story: Coven.*
Works Cited


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Endnotes

1 The gap is as small as 80% as for what women are paid in compared to men. This does not take into account racial disparities, where often minorities are paid significantly less than their white counterparts. The gap between white men and hispanic or latina women is closer to 46%, wherein hispanic or latina women make 54% of what a man makes doing the same job (Miller).

2 Winnie Adams is featured in a *New York Times* piece entitled “My Sister’s Keeper”, which examines the decline in lesbian separatist communes. Notably, the work lives in the ‘Fashion and Style’ section of the news website.

3 The second wave, which is typically categorized as being from 1960 until the early 1990s, was a feminist move, wherein women-only, and a radical ‘New Left’ emerged. Feminine things, like Miss America, were demonized. The movement, unlike the first wave, rose more out of a working class, rather than a middle class. Women-only spaces, which were inherently biological, tended exclude blended groups, and were often exclusionary of transwomen (Rampton).

4 Radical here connotes a certain level of disruption on a structural level. This is not to be conflated with a radical feminism, like the one held by Winnie Adams, wherein feminism involves women-only spaces, just as there are men-only spaces. Rather than to delineate these spaces, a truly radical feminism would involve a complete disruption of those structures of segregated spaces. Separatist movements, including the one developed in *Coven* borrow from patriarchal ideologies of hierarchy, and thus really just recreate the same hierarchies with a different gender makeup. While there is value to be had in a separatist radicalism, that is not the focus of this essay.

5 In the original preface, Hawthorne wrote, “I, the present writer, as their representative, hereby take shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse incurred by them, as I have heard, and as the dreary and unprosperous condition of the race for many a long year back, would argue to exist- may be now and henceforth removed” (qtd. in Orians 67). Clearly Hawthorne felt haunted by his family’s actions in persecuting the Quakers, and was hoping his analysis on sin and guilt would help remedy that issue.

6 While prior to the Salem Witch Trials in 1692, this date wasn’t too early for Hawthorne’s setting. The first mention of witches in Europe came as early as 597 when Augustine encountered the pagan Saxons. By the tenth century, it was punishably but death for murder by witchcraft under King Athelstan (Cawthorne 15).

7 The show focuses heavily on Vodoo culture and its connections to witches, rather than on a Christian religious ideology featured in Hawthorne’s work.

8 Fiona’s abandonment of the Coven, and therefore her abandonment of her matriarchal/motherly duties mirrors that of colonial fears of witches. The witch was considered “the anti-housewife, threatening the domain who were responsible first for bearing and raising children, and second, for maintaining a well-kept household” (Natrelia 13). Fiona fails as a mother in this way for failing to raise Cordelia, but succeeds as a witch for this role. A failed matriarch might signal a successful witch.

9 Myrtle and Fiona’s conflict is explored via a series of flashbacks, wherein in Fiona is the popular, powerful girl at the school and Myrtle is a nerdy social outcast. Myrtle attempts to reveal Fiona’s plot to overthrow the previous supreme, but ultimately Myrtle fails to expose Fiona. Myrtle serves on Fiona’s Council, which is the Supreme’s advisory board and informal judiciary. At one point, Myrtle expresses desire to be the Supreme, but realizes she is not powerful enough as a witch to fulfill that role.

10 Mary and Mary Magdalene, both characters in the Christian Bible. Mary is a reference to the divine mother Mary who gave birth to Jesus Christ through divine conception. Mary Magdalene was a sex worker who came in contact with Jesus frequently during his travels with his apostles according to the Christian Bible.
Hawthorne’s reference to a Papist here means a Roman Catholic, or someone who follows the Papal state. Here, Hawthorne is calling to mind the strong Catholic affinity for Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ.

The Greek God Zeus seduces Metis and then swallows her after a prophecy is told that her second child will overthrow Zeus. Metis was with child at the time. Zeus develops a terrible headache. Rushing to his aid, Hephaestus splits open Zeus’ head with a wedge. From his head springs Athena, a fully formed and fully armored adult ("Athena").

Mary, once again referencing the divine mother Mary. Mrs. Brady is a reference to the 1969-1974 television show *The Brady Bunch*, wherein in a man with three sons marries a woman with three daughters. The show is comedic in nature.

The butler, Spaulding, is one of the few men in the series, and has no speaking role as he cut out his own tongue to protect Fiona’s secret. He mostly exists to literally clean up the messes that the Coven, and more specifically, Fiona’s mistakes. Spaulding helps her cover up multiple murders, all in the hopes of sustaining her matriarchal role.

Eve, from the book of *Genesis* in the Christian Bible. Eve is the first woman that God created, and commits the first sin by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and feeding it to Adam, the first man.

Hawthorne may have read Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Imp of the Perverse”, wherein Poe describes the perverse as “We peer into the abyss—we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably we remain….To indulge, for a moment, in any attempt at thought, is to be inevitably lost; for reflection but urges us to forbear, and therefore it is, I say, that we cannot. If there be no friendly arm to check us, or if we fail in a sudden effort to prostrate ourselves backward from the abyss, we plunge, and are destroyed” (Poe). Connecting the two works would mean that Pearl’s eyes are the abyss of perversity, and focusing on them for too long would mean destruction. This adds to Pearl’s perceived supernatural powers.

The book is a signifier of the contract witches sign in covenant with the Devil. The contract, according to accused witch Elizabeth Knapp, “was for seven years: one year she was to be faithful in his service, and the other side he would serve her and make her a witch” (Demos 108).

It is important to note that there is a strong familial connection in the people accused of witchcraft during the 1692 Salem Witch Trials. Sisters and daughters were often accused together (Karlsen 38). Thus, Murphy’s reinforcement of the importance of familial connection is supported by the historical account of the Salem Witch Trials.