

« RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER », THE CENCI
AND THE CENCI LEGEND

In the past dozen years, Hawthorne's « Rappaccini's Daughter » has taxed the ingenuities of numerous critics and scholars. It is the subject of separate chapters in five book-length studies of Hawthorne's fiction¹, and the cumulative *PMLA* bibliographies since 1955 list at least 21 articles focusing upon the tale. (« The Artist of the Beautiful », « My Kinsman, Major Molineux », and the perennial « Young Goodman Brown » have also been persistently gnawed at by recent critics, but none of the three has been reverted to as frequently as « Rappaccini's Daughter »). During this period, the critical emphases have been three-fold: tracing out of allegorical patterns, exploration of romantic and sexual ties between the various characters, and investigation of putative sources and analogues.

Most pre-1950s discussions of the allegory presumed implicit in the tale dealt with the *libido sciendi* of Dr. Rappaccini; recent discussions have generally been prompted by the questions which Hawthorne slipperily locates with Giovanni's consciousness: « Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? And this man [Rappaccini], with such a perception of harm in what his own hands caused to grow — was he the

1. RICHARD H. FOGLE, *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark* (Norman, Okla., 1953, rev. ed. 1964), pp. 91-104; HYATT WAGGONER, *Hawthorne: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1955, rev. ed. 1963), pp. 111-125; ROY MALE, *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision* (Austin, Texas, 1957), pp. 54-70; FREDERICK C. CREWS, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (New York, 1966), pp. 117-135; JAC THARPE, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Identity and Knowledge* (Carbondale, 1967), pp. 89-94.

Adam? »² The allegorists have usually leaped to the assumption that the Paduan garden *is* an Eden of some sort, and have then gone on to delineate the relationships between the four chief characters in the tale. If Rappaccini is Adam, then is Beatrice his Eve? Or, if Rappaccini is Satan, or perhaps God, then where do Beatrice and Giovanni and Baglioni fit into the scheme? ³ The explorers of the personal relationships in the tale also break with the earlier critical emphasis on Rappaccini as the inhuman scientific experimenter. Although they too are frequently drawn into a scanning of edenic patterns, their emphasis is likely to be upon the relationship between Giovanni and Beatrice, and particularly upon Giovanni's faltering love for Beatrice. In more recent years, critics have also been fascinated by the hints of incest and perversion lurking in the tale ⁴. And the source and parallel hunters have gone on piling up a disparate list of literary works which they trot forth as possible founts for various elements of Hawthorne's story ⁵.

My own essay, alas, will be primarily devoted to the tracing-out of one more possible analogue for « Rappaccini's Daughter ». I hope, however, that the parallel will be more persuasively argued than some which have been set forth, and

2. NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (Boston, 1882), II, 105. Subsequent quotations from this volume, part of the « Riverside Edition » assembled by George Parsons Lathrop, will be included parenthetically within the text.

3. For two examples of the persistent critical effort to allegorize the tale, see the pertinent chapters in the books by Waggoner and Male.

4. For the emphasis upon Giovanni, and the increasing concern with the sexuality of the tale, see the article by RICHARD HOVEY, « Love and Hate in 'Rappaccini's Daughter', » *University of Kansas City Review* (1962), 137-45, and the pertinent chapters in the books by Fogle and Crews.

5. While the suggested sources are not yet legion, they are numerous. Two recent articles added *Paradise Lost*, Keats' *Lamia*, Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Godwin's *St. Leon* to a list which already includes *The Metamorphoses*, *The Divine Comedy*, and *The Faerie Queene*. See BURTON R. POLLIN, « 'Rappaccini's Daughter' — Sources and Names », *Names*, XIV (1966), 30-35, and JULIAN SMITH, « Keats and Hawthorne: A Romantic Bloom in Rappaccini's Garden », *Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 42 (1966), 8-12.

that it will be seen to be more inclusive than any of the others which have been advanced. I also trust that my discussion will add some light to the heat engendered by the conflicting allegorical readings of the tale, and will provide a useful background for critics concerned with the troubling sexuality with which it is certainly permeated.

The parallel which I propose as a major determinant for « Rappaccini's Daughter » is the nineteenth-century romantic legend of Beatrice Cenci; more specifically, I propose as parallel Shelley's verse drama *The Cenci*, the work which most spectacularly embodied and channeled that legend, the work which did most to make the name of Beatrice Cenci a commonplace trigger of sympathetic responses in the breasts of at least three generations of literate Englishmen and Americans. Of all the nineteenth-century tellings of the Cenci legend which I know, Shelley's drama is the one which most closely resembles Hawthorne's story in plot and characterization, and it is at least arguable that the story echoes the drama in other respects.

A very few previous critics have noted the possibility that the Cenci legend and even Shelley's rendering of it were in Hawthorne's mind at the time he wrote « Rappaccini's Daughter », but not one has diligently pursued his insight. Harry Levin, for example, remarks that Beatrice Rappaccini possesses that « fascination of corrupted and corrupting purity which her namesake, Beatrice Cenci, exercised over Hawthorne and over Melville », but he goes no further⁶. More recently, Oliver Evans has observed parallels between the story and the Cenci legend and has even declared it « very possible that Hawthorne's interest in Beatrice Cenci was first aroused by the publication in 1820 of Shelley's tragedy, *The Cenci*, which was widely read on both sides of the Atlantic ». Evans notes

6. HARRY LEVIN, *The Power of Blackness* (New York, 1958), p. 61.

that in addition to the similar names of the two heroines there is another resemblance between the two works in that Count Cenci, « like Rappaccini, is power-mad, dedicated to the pursuit of evil, and he deliberately and systematically exposes his daughter to corruption ». Evans, however, does little more with the matter of Hawthorne's possible indebtedness to Shelley; deeming it « absurd to maintain that, on the realistic level, Hawthorne intended the reader to identify the situation of Beatrice Rappaccini with that of Beatrice Cenci », he contents himself with the brief observation that « on the richer level of symbol there is a close correspondence, for both cases involve the violation, on the part of a father, of a normal parent-child relationship, and a sin that is *unnatural* »⁷. To speculate on Hawthorne's intentions, of course, is no less absurd than futile; it may be argued, however, that both the legend and the play were part of the cultural baggage of the nineteenth-century reader and would have been responded to — unconsciously if not consciously⁸. What is more, there are far more extensive parallels between Hawthorne's story and Shelley's drama than Evans seems to have realized.

That Hawthorne was acquainted both with the Cenci legend and Shelley's *The Cenci* there can be little doubt. When he and his wife visited the Palazzo Barberini soon after their arrival in Rome in 1858, Sophia's excitement at being finally able to view the supposed portrait of Beatrice Cenci by Guido Reni could hardly be contained: « And now we sat down before Beatrice Cenci! At last, at last! after so many years' hoping

7. OLIVER EVANS, « Allegory and Incest in 'Rappaccini's Daughter' », *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XIX (1964), p. 192.

8. For the immense popularity of Shelley in Hawthorne's time, see JULIAN POWER, *Shelley in America in the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1940). For a list of some contemporaneous treatments of the Cenci material, see E. S. BATES, *A Study of Shelley's Drama The Cenci* (New York, 1908), p. 31, n. 1. The best evidence of the popularity of the Cenci legend, however, is provided by the unending stream of books of Italian travel. After 1830, Beatrice Cenci was a familiar figure in the historical panorama which Rome provided British and American tourists.

and wishing. This is a masterpiece which baffles words »⁹. Nathaniel, who also deemed the spell of the painting « indefinable », was equally moved:

... it is the very saddest picture that ever was painted, or conceived; there is an unfathomable depth and sorrow in the eyes; the sense of it comes to you by a sort of intuition. It is a sorrow that removes her out of the sphere of humanity; and yet she looks so innocent, that you feel as if it were only this sorrow, with its weight and darkness, that keeps her down upon the earth and brings her within our reach at all. She is like a fallen angel, fallen, without sin.

Immediately afterward, however, the Hawthorne who was apt to be cautious even in his enthusiasms wished « it were possible for some spectator, of deep sensibility, to see the picture without knowing anything of its subject or history; for, no doubt, we bring all our knowledge of the Cenci tragedy to the interpretation of it »¹⁰.

9. SOPHIA HAWTHORNE, *Notes in England and Italy* (New York, 1871), p. 212.

10. The second portion of the quoted material is to be found in Mrs. Hawthorne's severely edited *Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Boston, 1882), I, 82. The first portion is available only in the complete text of the notebooks established by Norman Holmes Pearson in his 1941 Yale University dissertation, « The French and Italian Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne ». The reaction of the Hawthornes to the painting was hardly unique. Similar bursts of enthusiasm are to be found in numerous travel books and subsequently published journals, but perhaps a couple of examples will indicate both the popularity of the Cenci legend and the viewers' conviction of Beatrice's sorrowful purity. Hawthorne's friend George Hillard was moved to these words after viewing the painting: « A sweet, soft, and gentle nature, born to be loved, sheltered, and caressed, is driven to madness, and loses its very essence, from outrage and wrong. It was a lily growing in a garden; an aerolite fell upon it and crushed it to the roots ». (*Six Months in Italy*, 2 vols. [Boston, 1853], I, 365). And Herman Melville, who had invoked the Cenci legend in *Pierre*, observed that in the painting there was an « Expression of suffering about the mouth (appealing look of innocence) not caught in any copy or engraving ». (*Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant*, ed. Howard C. Horsford [Princeton, 1955], pp. 200-201). The painting, by the way, now housed haphazardly in the Palazzo Corsini in Trastevere, is no longer deemed a portrait of Bea-

Hawthorne might easily have garnered some of his « knowledge of the Cenci tragedy » from books of Italian travel. He was a great reader of travel books of all sorts, and he was well acquainted with the work of a female writer who did much to establish the proper responses to the Barberini portrait. After meeting and visiting with Mrs. Anna Jameson in Rome, Hawthorne observed in his journal that he had « found great pleasure and profit in her works »¹¹. The impress of Mrs. Jameson's moralistic view of art, enunciated most strongly in her *Sacred and Legendary Art* of 1848, is palpably evident in Hawthorne's reactions to the churches and galleries of Italy, but he also knew something of her work as early as 1835, when he borrowed one of her books from the Salem Athenaeum¹². The title of the borrowed book cannot be determined, but very possibly it was Mrs. Jameson's very popular *Diary of an Ennuyée* (first published 1826, also reprinted in 1834 as part of *Visits and Sketches at Home and Abroad*). In this semi-fictional account of « a lady's » travels through Italy, he would have come upon a reaction to the Guido portrait as awestruck as his and Sophia's: « The expression of heart-sinking anguish and terror is just not *too* strong, leaving the loveliness of the countenance unimpaired; and there is a woe-begone negligence in the streaming hair and loose drapery which adds to its deep pathos »¹³.

Although Hawthorne's interest in the Cenci material was probably fanned by various writers, Shelley's name was the one most often linked with the legend; and Hawthorne's early familiarity with the bulk of Shelley's work can be easily

traced to the Cenci; as for its attribution to Guido Reni, some scholars think it might belong to the painter's early Roman period. (See CESARE GNUDI and G. C. CAVALLI, *Mostra di Guido Reni* [Bologna, 1954], pp. 103-104).

11. *Passages from the French and Italian Note-Books*, I, 177.

12. For a cataloguing and discussion of Hawthorne's borrowings from the Athenaeum library, see M. L. KESSELRING, « Hawthorne's Reading, 1828-1850 », *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, LIII (1953), 55-71, 121-38, 173-94.

13. ANNA JAMESON, *Visits and Sketches at Home and Abroad*, 4 vols. (London, 1834), IV, 49. For an account of Mrs. Jameson's life and writings, see CLARA THOMAS, *Love and Work Enough* (Toronto, 1967).

demonstrated. First of all, there is the fact that in both 1833 and 1835 he borrowed from the Salem Athenaeum an 1831 American edition of *The Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats*. The second time Hawthorne checked out this volume (which contains both *The Cenci* and Shelley's preface to the drama), he kept it for more than a month. Second, there is the fact of Hawthorne's extended references to Shelley's poetry in two of the sketches included, along with « Rappaccini's Daughter », in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. In the curious « P.'s Correspondence » the addled letter-writer discourses at length upon the youthful Shelley and the Shelley who has lived corporeally on into the fifth decade of the nineteenth century. While « P. » deems Shelley's early work « little other than a concrete arrangement of crystallizations, or even of icicles, as cold as they were brilliant », he is also reminded of how « Byron stood on the beach and beheld a flame of marvellous beauty rise heavenward from the dead poet's breast » (*Mosses*, II, 144). In « Earth's Holocaust », when Shelley's poems are tossed into the past-consuming flames, the narrator observes: « methought Shelley's poetry emitted a purer light than almost any other productions of his day » (*Mosses*, II, 170)¹⁴.

14. It is even possible that the central motif of « Earth's Holocaust » is derived from a passage in *The Cenci*. During one of Count Cenci's harangues, he threatens: « When all is done, out in the wide Campagna, / I will pile up my silver and my gold; / My costly robes, paintings and tapestries; / My parchments and all records of my wealth, / And make a bonfire in my joy, and leave / Of my possessions nothing but my name » (IV, i, 55-60). One contemporaneous discussion of Shelley that Hawthorne undoubtedly came across, since only four pages separated it from his sketch « Fire-Worship », was a lengthy essay featured in *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in December, 1843 — precisely twelve months before « Rappaccini's Daughter » appeared in the same magazine. The anonymous essayist remarks, apropos of *The Cenci*, that the work has « attained so wide a popularity, and has been so often criticized... that we shall have little to say of it ». Nevertheless, he goes on at some length, and what he says about Count Cenci and his daughter could very well be applied to Rappaccini and his daughter. In fact, the very words are reminiscent of those later employed by Hawthorne in the telling of his story: « The elder Cenci is the personification of unbridled Will. Rich enough to indulge every desire, and to purchase impunity for every crime, the white-haired and passion-torn father, opposing

Given the likelihood, then, that Hawthorne was fully acquainted both with the Cenci legend and Shelley's drama at the time he wrote « Rappaccini's Daughter », what, and how encompassing are, the possible congruences between the story and the legend, particularly between the story and Shelley's poetic version of the legend? They are many and are so extensive that it is difficult neatly to categorize them, but perhaps they may best be subsumed under the following headings: characterization, plot, setting, symbolic detail, and verbal texture. The verbal echoes, which I do not wish to insist on over-much, will be dealt with as I go along; the other matters I will take up in order.

All four of the major characters in « Rappaccini's Daughter » have their counterparts in Shelley's drama, and these latter four happen to be the only ones E. S. Bates, in his study of *The Cenci*, deems of major importance: Beatrice Cenci, Count Cenci, Cardinal Camillo, and Orsino¹⁵. It is not merely in their names that the two Beatrices resemble each other¹⁶. Both are, of course, beautiful young girls who exert a magnetic influence over all who come within their presence, and both are the victims of perverse fathers, but it is in the ambiguities of their characters that the two are most similar.

his own will, in a single burst of tremendous and fearful rage, to the will of the Almighty Father, becomes thereby the incarnation of all that is bad. It is a dreadful contrast which is formed between his demoniacal spirit and that of his angelic daughter. Beatrice, the lovely, sincere, high-minded woman, formed to adorn and grace the most exalted position, but bearing about a load of remediless griefs, of heart-wearing sorrows, is the bright light on a back-ground of awful tribulation and darkness. She is purity enveloped in a cloud of falsehood and strange vice». (*U. S. Mag. and Dem. Rev.*, XIII [1843], p. 612).

15. BATES, pp. 65-77.

16. Most critics concerned with the significance of Beatrice's name are apt to link her with Dante's guide in *The Divine Comedy*. See, for example, SIDNEY MOSS, « A Reading of 'Rappaccini's Daughter' », *Studies in Short Fiction*, II, (1965), pp. 152-53.

In his preface to *The Cenci*, when speaking of the Guido portrait, Shelley says, « In the whole mien there is a simplicity and dignity which, united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow, are inexpressibly pathetic. Beatrice Cenci appears to have been one of those rare persons in whom energy and gentleness dwell together without destroying one another. Her nature was simple and profound »¹⁷. This same mixture of energy and gentleness, dignity and profound simplicity, is to be found in Hawthorne's heroine. When Giovanni first spies her in the garden, Beatrice seems « redundant with life, health and energy » (*Mosses*, I, 106), but on the following day he is taken aback by her « expression of simplicity and sweetness, — qualities that had not entered into his idea of her character » (*Mosses*, I, 112). After Giovanni enters the garden he is constantly upset by Beatrice's seemingly contradictory nature. She talks about « matters as simple as the daylight or summer clouds », but there also emanate from her « thoughts . . . from a deep source, and fantasies of a gemlike brilliancy » (*Mosses*, I, 123). Even after the two become familiar there is « still a reserve in Beatrice's demeanor ». She will not permit Giovanni to touch her, and whenever he is tempted to do so Beatrice grows « so sad, so stern, and withal [wears] such a look of desolate separation, shuddering at itself, that not a spoken word [is] requisite to repel him » (*Mosses*, I, 126). Nevertheless, even after Baglioni attempts to warn him of Beatrice's poisonous influence, Giovanni conceives of her as a « simple, natural, most affectionate, and guileless creature » (*Mosses*, I, 131).

Finally, the two Beatrices clearly resemble each other in their seeming admixture of innocence and guilt. Hawthorne might exclaim, « Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! » but he as well as Shelley is concerned with « the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions » (*Mosses*, I, 115). Hawthorne's

17. All quotations from *The Cenci* and Shelley's brief preface are from *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London, 1905).

Beatrice is poisonous, there can be no doubt of that, but she is also the innocent victim of her father's unnatural science. She puts the case neatly when she adjures Giovanni: « believe it, though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature, and craves love as its daily food » (*Mosses*, I, 137). Shelley's Beatrice is a parricide, but she too is the victim of an unnatural father. To the officer who arrests her she says, « I am more innocent of parricide / Than is a child born fatherless » (IV, iv, 112-13), and she maintains her essential innocence to the end. What is more, both authors seem fully to subscribe to their heroines' insistence upon their transcendent purity. Shelley's espousal of his Beatrice's cause is, of course, less explicit than Hawthorne's defense of his Beatrice; no reader of *The Cenci*, however, can be unaware of the author's sympathy with his heroine. And the final charge of Shelley's Beatrice to her brother Bernardo, to be ever constant « to the faith that [she], / Though wrapped in a strange cloud of crime and shame, / Lived ever holy and unstained » (V, iv, 147-49), is remarkably like Hawthorne's final authorial comment upon his heroine, that « all this ugly mystery was but an earthly illusion, and that, whatever mist of evil might seem to have gathered over her, the real Beatrice was a heavenly angel » (*Mosses*, I, 134).

If the two Beatrices have much in common, then so do their two fathers. Rappaccini, who is unconcerned with public opinion and who wilfully poisons his daughter's corporeal being, is strikingly akin to Francesco Cenci, the lustful father who has no respect for his daughter's virtue and no fear of the judgment of man or God. Even in their physical and psychological make-ups the two are much alike; like Melville's Ahab, both show the marks of age and debilitation but are also filled with intellectual pride and energy. Rappaccini's face is « all overspread with a most sickly and sallow hue, but yet so pervaded with an expression of piercing and active intellect that an observer might easily have overlooked the merely physical attributes and have seen only this wonderful energy » (*Mosses*, I, 116-17). Beatrice Cenci bitterly complains that she should be tortured by « one

with white hair, and imperious brow » (III, i, 71), and very early in the play one of Cenci's spiritual advisers tells him: « How hideously look deeds of lust and blood / Through those snow white and venerable hairs » (I, i, 39-40). Finally, the similarity between the two old men is reinforced by the blasphemous manner in which they express their scorn for conventional morality. When Cenci learns of the death of two of his sons he gives a feast and holds aloft a bowl of wine as if he were conducting a Black Mass: « Could I believe thou wert their mingled blood, / Then would I taste thee like a sacrament, / And pledge with thee the mighty Devil in Hell » (I, iii, 81-83). And when his wife begs him to desist from curses that might call down on him the wrath of God, Cenci cries out: « He does His will, I mine! » (IV, i, 138).

Rappaccini's blasphemy is perhaps not as heaven-defying, but Hawthorne clearly indicates the disparity which exists between the scientist's outward form and inward impulse when the old man looks on at what he triumphantly assumes to be his successful union of Beatrice and Giovanni, both now transformed by his skills: « He paused; his bent form grew erect with conscious power; he spread out his hands over them in the attitude of a father imploring a blessing upon his children; but those were the same hands that had thrown poison into the stream of their lives » (*Mosses*, I, 138)¹⁸.

The weak foil to Francesco Cenci's evil is Cardinal Camillo; the equally ineffectual opponent of Dr. Rappaccini is the rival physician, Baglioni. Camillo is actually a more sympathetic figure than Baglioni, who seems motivated more by professional jealousy than altruism, but behind Camillo there is always the offstage presence of the Pope and the Church; he, like Baglioni, is a spokesman for convention and institutionalized conscience. Like the Baglioni who dismisses Rappaccini as a « vile empi-

18. The scarcely concealed sexual imagery of the passage only adds to the sense of blasphemy. One might also note the similarities between Rappaccini's blessing and that pronounced by the satanic figure in « Young Goodman Brown ».

ric . . . not to be tolerated by those who respect the good old rules of the medical profession » (*Mosses*, I, 130), he is caught up in the arid forms of the Church and is unable to comprehend either Beatrice or her father. It is in their impotence and misguided fervor, however, that the two counsellors are most alike. Baglioni, who is unable to distract Giovanni from his fascination with Beatrice, is at least the agent, if not the cause, of her death. Camillo, whose cautions to Count Cenci are invariably shrugged off, is equally unsuccessful in his efforts to obtain the Pope's pardon for Beatrice. He is not a cause or agent of her death (although he is delegated to pronounce final sentence upon her), but in his hopes that he might save her he is as deluded as the Baglioni who trusts in the antidote he has concocted against Rappaccini's poisons.

As for Giovanni, Hawthorne's fourth and perhaps most important character, he too has his counterpart amid the personages of Shelley's drama: Orsino the prelate, who is enamoured of Beatrice but more in love with himself, and who flees in disguise when Cenci's murder comes to light. Since the role of Giovanni is of such importance in « Rappaccini's Daughter », and since that of Orsino is not of such weight in *The Cenci*, it will be best at this point to fuse the discussion of their characters with a consideration of the plots in which they figure. The main plot of *The Cenci* focuses upon Beatrice—upon her defilement by her father, her complicity in his destruction, her trial and rebellious acceptance of her doom. The plot of « Rappaccini's Daughter » moves toward Beatrice's death, but she has been victimized by her father long before the story opens; the plot focuses not upon Beatrice but upon Giovanni's attraction to her and the unfolding of his relations with her. The story is narrated from Giovanni's point of view, and he is its psychological and moral center. And the failure of Giovanni's love for Beatrice has much in common with the false and incomplete love of Orsino for Beatrice that is revealed in the primary subplot of *The Cenci*.

The first words spoken by Beatrice Cenci to Orsino, « Pervert not truth » (I, ii, 1), could just as well serve as an injunc-

tion to the Giovanni who ultimately fails to heed what Beatrice says to him when he first talks with her in the garden: « the words of Beatrice Rappaccini's lips are true from the depths of the heart outward » (*Mosses*, I, 122). Both young men are distracted by the physical beauty of their respective Beatrices (images of Beatrice fill Orsino's « slumbers with tumultuous dreams » [II, ii, 135], and after Giovanni's first glimpse of Beatrice he dreams of « a rich flower and beautiful girl » [*Mosses*, I, 107]), but they are unable to assess the two girls' inward loveliness—just as they are unable to sort out their apparent corruption but inward purity.

Orsino, who reveals his nature in extended soliloquies, is much more aware of his self-centeredness than is Giovanni, and the shallowness of his love is apparent from the outset. In the very first act, he admits his awe of Beatrice: « I fear / Her subtle mind, her awe-inspiring gaze, / Whose beams anatomize me nerve by nerve / And lay me bare, and make me blush to see / My hidden thoughts » (I, ii, 83-87). After he has embarked upon the devious course that will save his skin but reveal his treachery, he can still exclaim: « Oh, fair Beatrice! / Would that I loved thee not, or loving thee / Could but despise danger and gold and all / That frowns between my wish and its effect » (II, ii, 128-31). Even after he has made his final decision to flee Rome he fears that « what is past will never let [him] rest » and painfully muses, « where shall I / Find the disguise to hide me from myself, / As now I shrink from every other eye » (V, i, 94, 102-104).

Giovanni never attains the knowledge of his conceited weakness that Orsino possesses, but Hawthorne makes very clear the extent of his inferiority to the Beatrice he claims to love. Early in the story he remarks, « Guasconti had not a deep heart » (*Mosses*, I, 115), and a bit later he suggests that Giovanni's passion is but « that cunning semblance of love which flourishes in the imagination, but strikes no depth of root into the heart » (*Mosses*, I, 125). After Giovanni's second interview with Baglioni, Hawthorne comments that « now his spirit was incapable of sustaining itself at the height to

which the earlier enthusiasm of passion had exalted it; he fell down, grovelling among earthly doubts, and defiled there-with the pure whiteness of Beatrice's image » (*Mosses*, I, 131). On the last day Beatrice will live, Giovanni looks at himself in a mirror before going down into the garden, and Hawthorne observes of his complacency: « a vanity to be expected in a beautiful young man, yet, as displaying itself at that troubled and feverish moment, the token of a certain shallowness of feeling and insincerity of character » (*Mosses*, I, 132). Finally, after Giovanni has decided to administer Baglioni's antidote, in hopes of « returning within the limits of ordinary nature, and leading Beatrice, the redeemed Beatrice, by the hand », Hawthorne forcefully exclaims: « O weak and selfish and unworthy spirit, that could dream of an earthly union and earthly happiness as possible, after such love had been so bitterly wronged as was Beatrice's love by Giovanni's blighting words » (*Mosses*, I, 137).

Hawthorne's passive Beatrice, who may be poisonous but who is in no wise malevolent, is in many respects what Shelley, thinking of the requisites of drama, said his Beatrice could not be: « the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character » (Preface to *The Cenci*). In return for the injuries she suffers, Hawthorne's Beatrice does offer « peace and love »; it is her misfortune to receive no love in return. Both she and Shelley's Beatrice suffer because for neither is there fulfillment of a vision vouchsafed to Count Cenci in one of his blasphemous prayers: « Her bright loveliness / Was kindled to illumine this dark world / If nursed by Thy selectest dew of love / Such virtues blossom in her as should make / The peace of life » (IV, i, 121-25). Neither Orsino nor Giovanni will accept the terms of the love proffered by the two Beatrices (just as Beatrice talks with Giovanni as if he were « like a brother » [*Mosses*, I, 123],

so the other Beatrice says to Orsino, « And thus I love you still, but holily, / Even as a sister or a spirit might » [I, ii, 24-25]), and in the end both are as reprehensible and corrupting as the two fathers. Beatrice's withering last words to Giovanni, « O, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine »? (*Mosses*, I, 139) strikingly echo a passage in the sad lament Beatrice Cenci sings in her dungeon: « There is a snake in thy smile, my dear; / And bitter poison within thy tear » (V, iii, 136-37).

As for the setting of Hawthorne's tale, it too could owe something to *The Cenci*. Rappaccini's garden, with its remnants of antique statuary, entered by a devious passageway from the « high and gloomy » buildings encircling it, and located « in the heart of the barren city » (*Mosses*, I, 102, 108), would not be out of place beneath the windows of the Palazzo Cenci which Shelley describes in his preface:

The Cenci Palace is of great extent; and though in part modernized, there yet remains a vast and gloomy pile of feudal architecture . . . The palace is situated in an obscure corner of Rome . . . and from the upper windows you see the immense ruins of Mount Palatine, half hidden under their profuse growth of trees. There is a court in one part of the Palace . . . supported by granite columns and adorned with antique friezes of fine workmanship, and built up, according to ancient Italian fashion, with balcony over balcony of open-work. One of the gates of the Palace formed of immense stones and leading through a passage, dark and lofty and opening into gloomy subterranean chambers, struck me particularly.

In addition, it seems not too far-fetched to suggest a connection between *The Cenci* and the edenic haze that lingers over Hawthorne's secret garden. In the play's final act, Beatrice awakens and says: « I was just dreaming / That we were all in Paradise. Thou knowest / This cell seems a kind of Paradise / After our father's presence » (V, iii, 9-12). In the very last scene her mother tells her to « Trust in God's sweet

love, / The tender promises of Christ: ere night, / Think, we shall be in Paradise » (V, iv, 75-77). Hawthorne, after speaking of Giovanni's unworthy hopes of redeeming Beatrice, says: « she must bathe her hurts in some fount of paradise, and forget her grief in the light of immortality, and *there* be well » (*Mosses*, I, 137).

One may also easily presume a link between the edenic overtones of the tale and the common Italian setting of the two works. Although the tendency of Americans to identify the virgin continent of North America with the biblical paradise is by now a critical commonplace, it has not often been noted that for nineteenth-century Americans there was another land, Italy, almost equally capable of evoking reminiscences of Eden. Such associations were not peculiar to Americans, and behind them lay a long literary and artistic tradition that had identified the Italian landscape with Arcadia and, by extension, with Eden; Americans, however, were probably unique in that they persistently identified Italy with Eden *and* the Fall. Such an identification was partly the result of the Americans' sense of inhabiting a new Eden not tainted with evil, partly the consequence of the ambiguous fascination Italy had for Americans: it was a land of striking beauty, but it was also the land of the presumably corrupt Catholic Church, a land where people were violent, passionate, and treacherous, a land with a bloody and turbulent history¹⁹. Catherine M. Sedgwick may have been a bit extravagant but undoubtedly expressed the sentiments of many of her contemporaries when she concluded a travel account published in 1841 with these words: « Our route from Florence to Genoa was a scene of enchantment; and, finally, when we embarked at Genoa and left the Italian shore, we

19. For accounts of the potent fascination Italy had for American writers and artists, see NATHALIA WRIGHT, *American Novelists in Italy* (Philadelphia, 1965), and my two articles: « Washington Allston: Banditti in Arcadia », *AQ*, XIII (1961), 387-401, and « Cultural Ambivalence in Constance Fenimore Woolson's *Italian Tales* », *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, XII (1967), pp. 291-299.

felt much as I fancy Adam and Eve did when the gates of Paradise closed upon them »²⁰. Hawthorne made New England the setting for another edenic tale included in *Mosses From an Old Manse*; the conclusion of « The New Adam and Eve » is resolutely hopeful, however, with Eve assuring Adam: « we shall always be together » (*Mosses*, II, 29). Could the image of a beautiful but corrupt Italy, one quite consonant with an American's reading of *The Cenci*, have been lurking in Hawthorne's mind when he wrote the more lurid and more despairing « Rappaccini's Daughter »?

In addition to the edenic allusions, there are other parallels between the symbolic texture of *The Cenci* and « Rappaccini's Daughter ». Before going on to discuss these, however, I wish to make two limiting observations. First, since Shelley and Hawthorne are both romantic writers, it is only to be expected that their imagery and symbolism have much in common. Second, while Hawthorne's symbols tend to be concretely realized as part of his setting, Shelley's tend to emerge as part of the highly metaphoric speech of his protagonists. These demurrers being admitted, however, Hawthorne's symbolism still seems to be enough reminiscent of Shelley's verse to hypothesize the possibility that *The Cenci* was influential in shaping the contours of « Rappaccini's Daughter ».

At least a shadowy resemblance may be traced between the mirror and darkness images of the two works. While Giovanni reveals himself as he stands before his mirror, Beatrice Cenci is referred to as a « perfect mirror of pure innocence »; her brother Giacomo, however, regrets that he ever found in Orsino's « smooth and ready countenance / The mirror of [his] darkest thoughts » (V, iv, 130; V, i, 20-21). The blackness in which Rappaccini is always garbed is similarly associated with Francesco Cenci. At the moment of his death, Beatrice says, « Darkness and Hell / Have swallowed up

20. CATHERINE M. SEDGWICK, *Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home*, 2 vols. (New York 1841, II, 297.

the vapour they sent forth / To blacken the sweet light of life » (IV, iii, 40-42); of himself, Cenci boasts: « I bear a darker deadlier gloom / Than the earth's shade, or interlunar air, / Or constellations quenched in murkiest cloud » (II, i, 189-91).

More extensive resemblances may be traced between the two works' flower and serpent-worm-reptile images. The second pattern is not pronounced in « Rappaccini's Daughter », but it is functionally important. It suggests both the loathsomeness of the scientist's experiments and the horror of Giovanni's suspicions. A lizard (along with an insect and a spider) seems to expire when exposed to the noxious influence of the garden's flowers, and Beatrice implores Giovanni to « forget that there ever crawled on earth such a monster as poor Beatrice » (*Mosses*, I, 136). Such images are repeatedly employed in *The Cenci*, mainly to convey the vile depths of the Count's imagination, but also to suggest his and Orsino's treacherous natures. Cenci addresses his daughter as a « painted viper » (I, iii, 165) and prays that she be « speckled like a toad » (IV, i, 132). Beatrice complains that she is pent up « naked in deep cells / Where scaly reptiles crawl » (III, i, 46-47), and Cenci's wife says of him that one « might as safely waken / A serpent » (IV, iv, 15-16). At one point in the drama, in a passage which could apply equally well to either Beatrice, Giacomo Cenci apostrophizes his sister in these words: « Beatrice, / Who in the gentleness of thy sweet youth / Hast never trodden on a worm, or bruised / A living flower, but thou hast pitied it » (III, i, 365-68). The flower imagery is more important in « Rappaccini's Daughter », where Beatrice impresses Giovanni as being « another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones, as beautiful as they, more beautiful than the richest of them » (*Mosses*, I, 106), but it is also pronounced in *The Cenci*, where such images are frequently employed to suggest Beatrice's innocence and fragile beauty. Shelley's Beatrice, as well as Hawthorne's, is a flower. When Bernardo awakens her in prison, he says, « I must shake the heavenly dew of rest / From this sweet folded flower » (V,

iii, 7-8). And when he bids her farewell he begs her: « Let me / Kiss those warm lips before their crimson leaves / Are blighted . . . white . . . cold » (V, iv, 137-39).

Finally, both works are replete with images of monstrous blight and poisonous corruption. Rappaccini's garden is an « Eden of poisonous flowers » (*Mosses*, I, 126), and the word « poison » springs naturally to the lips of the characters in *The Cenci*. The Count confesses that his « greater point » in his torment of Beatrice was to « poison and corrupt her soul » (IV, i, 43-44). Beatrice is fully aware of the venomous nature of her father's malice. After he has assaulted her, she despairingly tells her step-mother:

There creeps
A clinging, black, contaminating mist
About me . . . 'tis substantial, heavy, thick . . .
And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life!
(III, i, 16-23)

In the last act, in one more passage that would fit neatly into the text of Hawthorne's story, she says: « And so my lot was ordered, that a father / First turned the moments of awakening life / To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet hope » (V, ii, 120-22).

In both works, images of poisoning are fused with images of perversion and horrifying monstrosity. Count Cenci prays that Beatrice's « food be / Poison, until she be encrusted round / With leprous stains! » (IV, i, 128-30). When Giovanni's suspicions of Beatrice undermine his weak love for her, he wretchedly cries out: « Thou hast filled my veins with poison! Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and as deadly a creature as thyself, — a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity! » (*Mosses*, I, 135). Charles Boewe has suggested that the images of vegetable monstrosity in « Rappaccini's Daughter », images often sexually graphic, may owe something to Hawthorne and his contemporaries' doubts about

the propriety of botanical experiments with crosspollination²¹; such images, however, might just as easily have been prompted by *The Cenci*, which is redolent not only with the brimfire of incest but with numerous allusions to other perversions of the natural order. Giovanni's sense that many of the plants in the garden are « no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy » (*Mosses*, I, 120), may be set off against Beatrice Cenci's realization that « Horrible things have been in this wide world, / Prodigious mixtures, and confusions strange / Of good and ill » (III, i, 51-53) — or against Cenci's boast that « upon Earth / All good shall droop and sicken, and ill things / Shall with a spirit of unnatural life / Stir and be quickened » (IV, ii, 186-89). It may even be not too wide of the mark to suspect a link between Beatrice's kinship with the grossly beautiful purple shrub in the center of her father's garden (of the shrub, Beatrice testifies: « at the hour when I first drew breath, this plant sprang from the soil, the offspring of his science, of his intellect, while I was but his earthly child » [*Mosses*, I, 134]) and the most blasphemous curse Count Cenci heaps upon his daughter:

That if she ever have a child; and thou,
Quick Nature! I adjure thee by thy God,
That thou be fruitful in her, and increase
And multiply, fulfilling his command,
And my deep imprecation! May it be
A hideous likeness of herself, that as
From a distorting mirror, she may see
Her image mixed with that she most abhors,
Smiling upon her from her nursing breast.

(IV, i, 141-49)

If one does admit the possibility that *The Cenci* was at least a part, perhaps a goodly part, of the provenance of « Rappaccini's Daughter », then what are some of the possi-

21. CHARLES BOEWE, « Rappaccini's Garden », *AL*, XXX (1958), 37-49.

ble consequences for our reading of the tale? First of all, particularly if one accepts James Rieger's argument that Shelley's drama is an heretical work that advances a gnostic and manichean view of the Christian God as an agent of evil and celebrates Beatrice's parricide as a virtuous rebellion against the forces of evil²², some support may be adduced for those allegorists who view Rappaccini and Baglioni as paired agents of evil and Beatrice as their innocent victim. Such a reading, when cast into the edenic framework of the tale, could identify Rappaccini as either God or Satan and Baglioni as an ineffectual and inadvertent God. Giovanni and Beatrice would then be Adam and Eve; Hawthorne's version of Genesis, however, would then insist on Eve's innocence and Adam's abject culpability. Also, if Hawthorne's tale is a version of the edenic myth, it must be remembered that the events in his Garden of Paradise take place after the Fall—and that Hawthorne offers no hope that an Earthly Paradise may ever be won again.

Such allegorical readings, however, must struggle with the difficulty of fitting Giovanni into any sort of Adamic mold and also with the fact that Hawthorne, while insisting upon her essential innocence, does not portray Beatrice as a rebel against her fate. Hawthorne may have been indebted to *The Cenci*, but his tale significantly departs from the plot and action of the drama. Not only is his Beatrice a very different victim of a father's perverse desires; she is also much less in the foreground. If Hawthorne's conception of Giovanni owes something to Shelley's Orsino, it must also be noted that Orsino does not have a commanding role in the drama. Careful consideration of the nature of Hawthorne's borrowings from Shelley (if borrowings there were) leads then to the proposition that « Rappaccini's Daughter » is not so much an allegory as a tale concerned with the devious ways of love—a tale which recounts the failure of nerve on the part of a lover who

22. JAMES RIEGER, *The Mutiny Within: The Heresies of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (New York, 1967), pp. 111-128.

is unable to trust his better faith, unable to do so because his love is shallowly rooted in a sterile heart.

A sense of the complex relationships between *The Cenci* and « Rappaccini's Daughter » will also be useful for readers concerned with the specifically sexual tenor of the tale. Such an awareness, however, will not greatly support the efforts of such critics as Frederic Crews to relate the ambiguities of the tale to Hawthorne's personal fears and misgivings about sex. « Rappaccini's Daughter » deals covertly with incest and is filled with sexual trepidations, but one cannot so assuredly take its imagery as revelatory of Hawthorne's buried self if one admits the possibility of its indebtedness to *The Cenci*, and if one is aware of the immense popularity of the legend of Beatrice Cenci during the nineteenth century. Hawthorne may not, after all, have had either *The Cenci* or the widely diffused legend in mind when he wrote « Rappaccini's Daughter »; I insist, though, that it is not without significance that the perplexities posed by the seeming contradictions of Beatrice Rappaccini's nature are almost identical with those reported by tourists who trekked to the Palazzo Barberini to view the reputed portrait of the renaissance parricide—and that both he and the tourists (and he as a tourist), in spite of all the factual evidence, thrust through the dilemma by insisting on the innate goodness of the two Beatrices. The popularity of the Cenci legend and the enormous appeal of her presumed portrait may imply certain defects in the romantic sensibilities of nineteenth century Britishers and Americans²³, but it seems presumptuous to attribute the fascination Beatrice Cenci had for Hawthorne to his particular psychological quirks²⁴.

23. For the prevalence of incestuous motifs in romantic literature, see MARIO PRAZ, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson 2nd ed. (London, 1951), and PETER THORSLEY, « Incest as Romantic Symbol », *Comparative Literature Studies*, II (1965), 41-58.

24. Of course, it is not impossible to argue diametrically otherwise. If one is inclined to agree with Crews's assertion that « Hawthorne's own sense of guilt, rooted in the twin themes of incest and parricide, informs his idea of history » (*op. cit.*, p. 59), then one can readily see how Hawthorne could have been attracted to the image of Beatrice Cenci.

Finally, a realization of the probable influence of the Cenci legend and Shelley's drama upon « Rappaccini's Daughter » is apt to reinforce the suspicion that we of the twentieth century may never be able to respond with sureness and complete satisfaction to Hawthorne's tale. We may appreciate the pathos of the separation from common humanity suffered by the two girls, and the enormity of the crimes wreaked upon them, but yet we cannot refrain from thinking that they are not wholly pure and innocent. We can share Hawthorne's scorn for the weakness of Giovanni's love, yet not without some foundation are the « horrible suspicions that [rise], monster-like, out of the caverns of his heart » (*Mosses*, I, 126). Hawthorne might insist upon « the pure whiteness of Beatrice's image » (*Mosses*, I, 131), but Shelley well expressed the troubled doubts of modern readers when he wrote: « It is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that what she has done needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered, consists » (Preface to *The Cenci*).

According to his son Julian, when Hawthorne was half-way through the composition of « Rappaccini's Daughter », Sophia asked him, « But how is it to end . . . is Beatrice to be a demon or an angel? » Hawthorne's reply (« spoken with some emotion ») was, « I have no idea! » In the end, he chose what Julian describes as « the brighter alternative »²⁵ and affirmed his belief in Beatrice's ascension to a realm where the evil her father « has striven to mingle with [her] will pass away like a dream » (*Mosses*, I, 139). Our doubts as to her wholly angelic nature remain with us, however, and it is not amiss to wonder if Hawthorne has not indulged in some of the « restless . . . casuistry » Shelley ascribes to admirers of

25. JULIAN HAWTHORNE, *Hawthorne and His Wife*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1884), I, 360.

Beatrice Cenci. On the other hand, one can be certain that Sophia was in sympathy with the denouement of her husband's tale. After all, she deemed Beatrice Cenci « a spotless lily of Eden, trailed over by a serpent, and unable to understand the desecration, yet struck with a fatal blight »²⁶.

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26. *Notes in England and Italy*, p. 213.