

## RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER: THE GOTHIC AS A CATALYST FOR HAWTHORNE'S IMAGINATION

In the half-playful, half-serious Preface to « Rappaccini's Daughter », Hawthorne describes himself as a writer occupying an unfortunate position between the Transcendentalists (who, under one name or another, have their share in all the current literature of the world) and the great body of pen-and-ink men who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude<sup>1</sup>.

Since it would fall beyond the scope of this paper to examine the relationship between Hawthorne and Transcendentalism in detail, I shall limit myself to the aspect which is most relevant to my present purpose.

Of Emerson's thought, Hawthorne accepted the concept of the phenomenal character of the natural, physical world; he could not accept, however, his optimism, whereby in the Over-Soul, evil—being pure negation in the Spinozistic sense—does not exist, therefore representing, in the individual, only a moment easily overcome. Moreover, seeing the individual as a moment of the Absolute, wherein the Absolute itself is realized, Emerson is led to a glorification of individualism: man is self-sufficient as regards society, as we can see, for instance, in « Self-Reliance ».

A parallel could be drawn — *mutatis mutandis* — bet-

1. *Great Short Works of Hawthorne*, edited, with an Introduction, by F. C. CREWS (New York, 1967), p. 318. All subsequent references will be to this edition, and page-numbers will be indicated in brackets in the text. For Hawthorne and Transcendentalism, see also C. GORLIER, *L'Universo Domestico* (Roma, 1962), especially p. 115, and E. ZOLLA, *Le Origini del Transcendentalismo* (Roma, 1963), Ch. III and Ch. XII.

ween Hawthorne's position in respect to Emerson and the position of Kierkegaard in respect to Hegel. For Kierkegaard, the individual is not a moment of the Absolute, and it is in sin and in the consciousness of sin that he affirms his relative independence as an individual, paradoxically balanced between being and non-being. Having gained consciousness of his state with « anguish » (*Angst*), he can see how absolutely inadequate and false ordinary morality is: the philistine morality of those who are unaware of the drama of true religious life. Also for Hawthorne, who still feels the Calvinistic tradition rejected by Emerson, in man there is radical evil inherent in his finiteness, which cannot be transcended by simply affirming his relationship with the divine origin of the universality of spirit. Until he descends into the depths of the self, there to discover evil, man cannot understand the real essence of life as a moral strife, as an existential drama perpetually enacted in the theatre of the soul. Even in a secularized interpretation such as Hawthorne's, evil is essentially the product of egotism, which causes the individual to estrange himself from the society of his fellow-beings, that *societas* in which he was formed and which is the only alternative to tragic alienation. Isolation<sup>2</sup> is both guilt and its consequences, and therefore it is already punishment, hell in this world: the inevitable retribution for man, who in his lack of self-awareness or, worse, in his intellectual pride, presumes to be god-like, maker and judge.

The core of his opposition to Emerson was certainly clear to Hawthorne, but he did not formulate it theoretically<sup>3</sup>: it

2. The ever-present theme of isolation and loneliness in Hawthorne has been ably discussed by B. PISAPIA, « La solitudine nella letteratura americana dell'Ottocento » (*Studi Americani*, n. 3) (1957), 137-70, 138-44 and 153-56.

3. R. CHASE seems to me quite right when, in his *The American Novel and its Tradition* (Garden City, N. Y., 1957), he observes: « Hawthorne often gives the illusion of a systematic intellectual prowess, and this has led many readers to find in him an important moralist, political thinker, or theologian. It is an illusion, ... the unities of his conceptions are first of all *aesthetic* unities » (p. 74).

was, rather, embodied in his work as a result of his awareness of the presence of evil in man, his perception of « a blackness, ten times black », of what Miriam calls « that pit of blackness that lies beneath us, every-where »<sup>4</sup>. Rather than beneath us, however, Hawthorne stresses that it lies within us, in the « inner sphere » of the heart, and that it separates man from his fellow-beings: in « Rappaccini's Daughter », Beatrice feels that there is « a gulf of blackness between them [herself and Giovanni] which neither she nor he could pass » p. 346), a gulf which can be bridged only by unselfish love and mutual acceptance.

In bringing to the fore the human drama and in setting it against a metaphysical background, in focusing on the timeless dimension of man — disregarding as unessential the phenomenal aspect of reality, which is expended in time and is therefore devoid of an absolute value of its own (« We dwell in the shadow of Time, itself a shadow cast by Eternity », as he says in a passage of the *American Notebooks*) — Hawthorne is led to reject any form of documentary, psychologically superficial art such as the novel, which aims at « a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience »<sup>5</sup>. Man's ordinary experience is confined to appearance, and therefore can never reach those hidden spiritual significances which lie beyond it and are the only true reality. For Hawthorne, then, art must be more like myth than like document<sup>6</sup>: but, as H. H. Wag-

4. H. MELVILLE, « Hawthorne and his Mosses » in *The Shock of Recognition*, ed. Edmund Wilson (N. York, 1943), p. 192; *The Marble Faun* (London, 1896), p. 127.

5. *The House of the Seven Gables*, Introd. by HARRY LEVIN (Columbus, Ohio, 1969), Preface, p. 1.

6. An early, quite explicit refusal of art as close adherence to outward reality is to be found in « The Antique Ring », where a girl asks her fiancé (« no unfavourable specimen of a generation of rising writers ») to tell her the story of the ring he has just given her: « ... Not that I should be too scrupulous about facts. If you happen to be unacquainted with its authentic history, so much the better ... In short, you must kindle your imagination

goner has observed, there are true myths and false ones, and art, in Hawthorne's view, had better be true<sup>7</sup>, or else it « sins unpardonably ». Just as in his ethical vision, pride and lack of human sympathy are the « Unpardonable Sin »<sup>8</sup>, so in art what is unforgivable for Hawthorne is to take the shadowy phantoms of appearance for the truth. « M. de l'Aubépine » generally « contents himself with a very slight embroidery of outward manners, — the faintest possible counterfeit of real life » (Preface, p. 318): it is clear that this seemingly self-deprecatory remark, like the ones quoted above, is not to be taken at its face value as many critics have done, as evidence of Hawthorne's regret at not being able to write like Trollope, for instance, whom he admired. Hawthorne is not interested in the mere accidents and conventionalities, the surface occurrences of life: « the main concern of the romance was not external details, exactly presented settings, turns of speech, or characterizing gestures. It was 'the life within the life' »<sup>9</sup>. The technique to express his apprehension of the inessentiality of phenomenal reality was found by Hawthorne in the romance, and more precisely, as we shall see, in the Gothic romance, with its supernatural and its mysterious, suggestive atmosphere.

at the lustre of this diamond, and make a legend of it ». (*Hawthorne's Short Stories*, edited, with an Introd., by NEWTON ARVIN (New York, 1946), pp. 337-38).

7. HYATT H. WAGGONER, *Hawthorne* (rev. ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 34.

8. Cf. « Ethan Brand »: « The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims! » (*Hawthorne's Short Stories*, p. 318).

9. F. O. MATTHESSSEN, *American Renaissance* (Oxford, 1941), p. 271. In his fundamental study « I racconti di Hawthorne » (in *Il Simbolismo nella Letteratura Nord-Americana*, Firenze, 1965, pp. 69-160), A. LOMBARDO illuminates an essential aspect of Hawthorne's literary process in the tales and romances where symbols are used and explored: « ... il processo, cioè, per cui la narrazione è anche il terreno di una personale ricerca conoscitiva dello scrittore » (p. 143). For a penetrating analysis and interpretation of Hawthorne's literary method, see also C. IZZO, « N. Hawthorne: Un metafisico della narrazione », in *Civiltà Americana*, 2 vols. (Roma, 1967), I, 57-92.

Hawthorne has been described by Brownell as « allegory-mad », and what he himself called his « inveterate love for allegory » has received much critical attention, notably from F. O. Matthiessen<sup>10</sup>. While Brownell obviously exaggerates, it is apparent that Hawthorne had inherited the allegorical habit of thought which characterized the Puritan mind, and what Matthiessen says about the genesis of Hawthorne's tales and romances, on the evidence of the *Notebooks*, is an excellent description of the way he worked. On the other hand, in his best works Hawthorne is no allegorist in the older sense, as he has no abstract frame of reference external to the story he is writing, to which his plot, characters, and action should rigidly adhere, according to a strictly intellectualistic process. Allegory, or communication by images of a concept or a connection between concepts for didactic purposes, follows — as a continued metaphor — a logical, rather than an emotional, consistency, and cannot actuate itself as art. In Hawthorne, however, the allegorical germs for his stories are

10. Cf. W. C. BROWNELL, *American Prose Masters* (New York, 1905), p. 80; MATTHIESSEN, Ch. VII, « Allegory and Symbolism ». Brownell's stricture had been anticipated, half a century earlier, by E. A. Poe in his well-known essay « Hawthorne's Tales » (1847): Poe sees him as « infinitely too fond of allegory », with a spirit of « metaphor run mad » (in *The Shock of Recognition*, p. 169). D. H. LAWRENCE, more perceptively, speaks of Hawthorne's « magical allegorical insight », seeing *The Scarlet Letter* as a « sort of parable, an earthly story with a hellish meaning », « one of the greatest allegories in all literature ». (« *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) (New York, 1969), pp. 99, 83). See also Y. WINTERS, « Maule's Curse, or Hawthorne and the Problem of Allegory », in *Hawthorne. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by A. N. KAUL (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1966), pp. 11-24: Winters sees Hawthorne as « essentially an allegorist », obsessed, throughout his life, with the problem of allegory (p. 11), using « allegory » in its narrowest, theological sense. According to him, Hawthorne achieved success only once, when he wrote *The Scarlet Letter* (« pure allegory »).

Among recent Italian studies in this connection, see the subtle essay by M. PAGNINI, « Struttura semantica del grande simbolismo americano » (in *Il Simbolismo nella letteratura Nord-Americana*, pp. 29-32), especially pp. 47-48; see also, by the same author, « *The Scarlet Letter* come metafora formale » in *Critica della Funzionalità* (Torino, 1970), pp. 155-169.

pervaded with emotion, and therefore act as the stimulus for a narrative which comes alive through the exactness of its psychological details and the dramatic immediacy achieved through the emotional response evoked in the reader. As Newton Arvin has observed, Hawthorne's « moralities » at his most characteristic are « far too completely dramatized, too iridescent psychologically »<sup>11</sup> to be seen merely as allegories. On the other hand, the suggestive atmosphere created is also used to give relief to the universal significance of the human drama represented, the drama of Everyman.

« Rappaccini's Daughter », a long tale or better, perhaps, a short romance, has justly been defined as « giving us the full range of Hawthorne's art in microcosm », and as one of Hawthorne's « most affecting fantasies »<sup>12</sup>; it also shows how much more profound, pervasive, and fruitful the influence of the best, most serious Gothic romances, such as *Frankenstein* and *Melmoth the Wanderer*, was on Hawthorne's art, both as regards theory and practice, than has usually been recognized; and, conversely, the tale in my opinion fully vindicates Hawthorne's originality in making use of Gothic material.

Several scholars have pointed out the extensive (and obvious) use of Gothic motifs and situations on Hawthorne's part throughout his literary career, sometimes in a deprecatory tone; among them, one may cite Jane Lundblad, who compiles a detailed but mechanical *repertoire* listing conventional Gothic motifs, and then proceeds to summarize the plot of several works by Hawthorne, identifying the presence of the motifs by referring to their number in the list; N. F. Doubleday, Leslie Fiedler, and W. B. Stein with his *Hawthorne's Faust*, exhausting and perceptive, though too exclusively focused on

11. *Hawthorne's Short Stories*, p. xii.

12. BERNARD McCABE, « Narrative Technique in 'Rappaccini's Daughter' », *MLN*, LXXXIV (March 1959), 213; MATTHIESSEN, p. 346.

the Faust-theme<sup>13</sup>. Though « Rappaccini's Daughter » has often been described as « Gothic », no critic to my knowledge has discussed in detail its plot, characters, and motifs with reference either to their probable sources, or more important, to the way in which Hawthorne has adapted and transformed them to suit his particular artistic, and not simply moral, purposes and needs.

The literary tradition which Hawthorne accepted and felt comprised among others, the Gothic writers, Scott, Dante, Spenser, Bunyan, and Johnson, who all exerted, in varying degree, an important influence on his artistic development. A study of Hawthorne's borrowings from Gothic fiction, conducted on a strict source-hunting basis, merely seeking in the older tradition the precedents for the motifs, situations, and characters we find in his works — though important and often useful — can obviously be justifiable only as the starting-point for a study of the use the artist has made of his sources and literary reminiscences, thus throwing light on his individual technique through the very parallel that can be established with the works that have stimulated his imagination.

Julian Hawthorne was underestimating the tenacity and ingenuity of later scholars and critics when he stated, with pardonable exaggeration: « If we search Hawthorne's tales and romances for traces of his readings, we are apt to come away empty »<sup>14</sup>. He was right, though, when he continued: « The literary seeds that had been planted in the fertile soil of his

13. JANE LUNDBLAD, *Hawthorne and the Tradition of Gothic Romance* (Upsala, 1946); N. F. DOUBLEDAY, « Hawthorne's Use of Three Gothic Patterns », *College English*, VII (Feb. 1946), 250-62; LESLIE A. FIEDLER, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (London, 1967), especially pp. 432-50; WILLIAM B. STEIN, *Hawthorne's Faust: A Story of the Devil Archetype* (Jacksonville, Fla, 1953).

14. JULIAN HAWTHORNE, *Hawthorne's Reading* (Cleveland, 1902), p. 2. In the course of the present study it is not my intention, naturally, to deal with all the possible literary sources of Hawthorne's work, however interesting such an investigation may be. A brief mention should however be made of the possible German influence on Hawthorne, which Poe took for granted in his review of *Twice-Told Tales* (in fact, he speaks of imitation). Hawthorne,

memory, disintegrated by his independent thought and warmed by his imagination, had been transformed into something new and unfamiliar ». It is precisely this process of disintegration and transformation that is essential for Hawthorne's art, as for that of any other writer: as T. S. Eliot has said, the great artist is very seldom an innovator, the originator of a new form or language — his originality and greatness lie rather in the subtle way he alters the existing tradition, employing whatever he finds there to suit his present needs, experimenting, and combining these « fragments » into new, significant wholes. Henry James has described Hawthorne's method in an often-quoted passage which is particularly apposite here: « Hawthorne is perpetually looking for images which shall place themselves in picturesque correspondence with the spiritual facts with which he is concerned, and of course the search is of the very essence of poetry »<sup>15</sup>. In

who knew Chamisso, had most probably read E. T. A. Hoffmann's tales in Carlyle's translation (also certainly known to Poe), and may have derived some motifs from him, such as for instance the magic garden full of exotic, strange flowers—it is amazing, however, how many magic gardens recur throughout world literature— of « Der golden Topf », and the scientist-magician who has « created » a beautiful, « artificial » girl (in fact, a mechanical doll) loved by a young student (cf. « Der Sandmann »). Zolla (p. 32) thinks that the purple shrub in Rappaccini's garden may derive from Hoffmann's « *Datura fastuosa* » (1821). Notwithstanding these, on the whole, superficial similarities, and certain analogies in their art-views, however, the constant undercurrent of ethic concern and the perception of the human condition which characterize Hawthorne's most valid work are lacking in Hoffmann. In my opinion, therefore, H. A. POCHMANN is right when he observes that « the influence of Chamisso and Hoffmann on Hawthorne's work must be put down as negligible, and that of Tieck as questionable ». (*German Culture in America* (Madison, Wis., 1957), p. 387).

15. H. JAMES, « Hawthorne » (1879) in *The Shock of Recognition*, pp. 516-17. G. MELCHIONI, in his perceptive study « Aspetti del simbolismo in H. James » (in *Il Simbolismo nella Letteratura Nord-Americana*, pp. 169-190) discusses Hawthorne's influence on James, giving an extremely lucid definition of H.'s own symbolism (p. 172). See also, by the same author, « Tradizione americana e romanzo inglese », *Studi Americani*, n. 1 (1955), 53-71. For James and H., see also M. BEWLEY, *The Complex Fate* (London, 1952), and H. JAMES, *Le Prefazioni*, ed. by A. LOMBARDO (Venezia, 1956), Introd. pp. xliv-v.



the Gothic tradition, Hawthorne found most of the images he needed, and when he was able to effect that transmutation and integration with other elements (such as, for instance, those drawn from Dante and classical myth) further to enrich their significance, the result was the creation of tales and romances, such as « Young Goodman Brown », « Rappaccini's Daughter », and *The Scarlet Letter*, to mention only three, where elements and images are fully integrated into a unique poetic structure in which spiritual facts and images, meanings and symbols coexist simultaneously, each reflecting and illuminating the other.

In these works, Hawthorne's use of Gothic motifs corresponds, in a way, to the use of functional metaphors in poetry, where they are not mere verbal extravagance or pure ornamentation, but expand and dilate the imaginative texture giving it additional reverberations of meaning which cannot be isolated or abstracted: as the story-teller in « The Antique Ring » says, « You know that I can never separate the idea from the symbol in which it manifests itself ». The Gothic motifs and images in Hawthorne could be said to be his « objective correlative », the formula not simply for a moral, allegorical meaning, but also — and more importantly — for a particular set of emotions which Hawthorne wishes to evoke in the reader.

The various well-known motifs and devices Hawthorne borrowed from Gothic fiction are by no means, however, the most important aspect of his indebtedness to the genre, which does not merely consist of « old, worn-out ideas and figures », as Jane Lundblad calls them<sup>16</sup>, committing the error, frequently incurred by many critics, of lumping together the crude, melodramatic productions of most Gothic writers, and mature,

16. LUNDBLAD, pp. III. See also M. VAN DOREN, *N. Hawthorne* (New York, 1949) who speaks disparagingly of « a preposterous tradition » (p. 33). Also S. PEROSA, who concisely but acutely outlines Hawthorne's relationship to the Gothic in his *Le vie della narrativa americana* (Milano, 1965), pp. 14-16 and 17-18, stresses only the negative, melodramatic aspects of the genre (see pp. 15-16).

serious works like *Caleb Williams*, *Frankenstein*, and *Melmoth*, which have a vitality and a dynamic quality that make them still valid nowadays. In such works Hawthorne found themes, narrative techniques and a significant form, as well as a mythical dimension underlying and expanding the implication of the dramatic plot, all of which he could adopt and adapt to the personal vision of the human condition and the awareness of the paradoxes it involves that he wished to express.

The question of form is a very interesting one, since Hawthorne's use of the romance and its implications, as has justly been pointed out by several critics, has great importance in helping us to define the peculiar quality of his art. It is therefore worthwhile to investigate the relationship that can be established on this point between Hawthorne and the Gothic tradition, and a brief examination of the prefaces written by Horace Walpole and Mrs Shelley shows how Hawthorne's theory of the romance as opposed to the novel, as well as other theoretical points he outlines in his own prefaces, were anticipated by these Gothic writers.

In the Preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, in which the author casts aside his disguise as a translator and proceeds to outline, *post eventum*, the reasons that prompted him to create a new genre, Walpole speaks of two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern (meaning by the latter the novel of manners):

In the former, all was imagination and improbability; in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life<sup>17</sup>.

Walpole also seeks a « neutral territory », as Hawthorne would almost a century later:

17. H. WALPOLE, *The Castle of Otranto*, with an Introd. by M. MUDRICK (New York, 1967), p. 19.

The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the moral agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak, and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions.

Walpole was here laying the theoretical foundations of Gothic fiction, and the underlying assumption, more clearly discernible in the later horror-Gothic, is that if events have psychological consistency, even within repulsive situations, the reader will find himself involved beyond recall<sup>18</sup>. This psychological fidelity and consistency, however, was seldom achieved by the early Gothic writers, notwithstanding their protestations of respecting the « rules of probability » as regarded the conduct of their characters: the « truth of the human heart », as Hawthorne would call it, was sacrificed to unabashed sensationalism and the exploitation of the supernatural and the horrible for their shock value. It was this crude depiction of human nature that S. T. Coleridge attacked in his review of *The Monk*:

The romance writer possesses an unlimited power over situations; but he must scrupulously make his characters act in congruity with them. Let him work *physical* wonders only, and we will be content to *dream* with him; but the first *moral* miracle which he attempts, he disgusts and awakens us. ... The extent of the powers that may exist, we can never ascertain; and therefore we feel no great difficulty in yielding a temporary belief to any, the strangest, situation of *things*. But that situation once conceived, how beings like ourselves would feel and act in it, our own feelings sufficiently instruct us; and we instantly reject that clumsy fiction that does not harmonize with them<sup>19</sup>.

18. Cf. R. D. HUME, « Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel », *PMLA*, 84 (March 1969), 285.

19. *Critical Review*, XIX (Feb. 1797); reprinted in *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. T. M. RAYSOR (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 373.

Walpole had opened possibilities of which he was but dimly aware; the form he rather crudely forged had a considerable aesthetic potential, and when, conscious of being a pioneer, he wrote that the new route he had struck would possibly pave the road for « men of brighter talents », he was entirely right<sup>20</sup>.

If we now examine the Preface (1817) to *Frankenstein*, written by Mrs Shelley with her husband's help, we can see how the implicit distinction she draws between the kind of fiction she is writing and the one concerned with « the ordinary relations of existing events » both look back at Walpole's two kinds of « romance » and forward to the explicit antithesis of the romance and the novel we find in Hawthorne's often-quoted Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*. After stating that the event on which her fiction is based « has been supposed ... as not of impossible occurrence », Mrs Shelley disclaims her according « serious faith to such an imagination », and goes on to say that the event

... however impossible as a physical fact, affords a point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield. ... I have thus endeavoured to preserve the truth of the elementary principles of human nature, while I have not scrupled to innovate upon their combinations<sup>21</sup>.

As a perusal of *Frankenstein* shows, Mrs Shelley fully avails herself of the « unlimited power over situations » which Coleridge attributed to the romance writer — the « latitude » Hawthorne will claim for « the writer who calls his work a Romance », specifying that he has « a right to present that truth [the truth of the human heart] under circumstances, to

20. Cf. WALPOLE, p. 20.

21. MARY SHELLEY, *Frankenstein*, with an introduction by R. E. DOUSE and D. J. PALMER (London, 1967), p. 1.

a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation »<sup>22</sup>. She also manages, however, to preserve « the truth of the elementary principles of human nature », once the initial situation is accepted, again in accordance with Coleridge's ideas as stated in the passage I have quoted above, and also in the *Biographia Literaria*, where in discussing his contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads* he outlines by what means he has endeavoured to procure « that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith »<sup>23</sup>.

The line of development of the romance as distinguished from the novel, beginning with Walpole and evolving, through constant experimentation, till it was transplanted in America for new, significant developments can be thus clearly traced<sup>24</sup>, and the Gothic influence, also as regards form, can be seen as much more important than is usually conceded.

Of course, it is not my intention to overemphasize the importance of this influence on Hawthorne, merely reducing him to an epigone of the genre, which would be manifestly inexact. But it would seem equally inexact to minimize the Gothic elements in his work, as has been done, for instance, by a lucid and perceptive critic like H. H. Waggoner. Leslie Fiedler, on the other hand, rightly points out Hawthorne's indebtedness to Gothic fiction in his *Love and Death in the American Novel* which, though containing many provocative insights into the relationship between the Gothic tradition and American fiction, seems to lose much of its objective value through the way the critic forces his own interpretation on the texts he analyzes, often — one feels — distorting their meaning to make them fit his pattern. In a syntactically perplexing paragraph, though, Fiedler states, in his customary tone of finality, that Hawthorne was

22. *The House of the Seven Gables*, p. 1.

23. Cf. *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. SHAWCROSS, 2 vols (Oxford, 1965), II, 5-6.

24. Cf. FIEDLER, *op. cit.*, *passim*; CHASE, *op. cit.*, Ch. I and II; JOEL PORTE, *The Romance in America* (Middleton, Conn., 1969).

Unaware of exactly what he is doing with his shadow characters: incapable of committing himself unreservedly to the gothic modes, but unable either to translate them into terms of psychological inwardness<sup>25</sup>.

Such a description in my opinion manifestly fails to do justice to Hawthorne's highly conscious artistic technique as exemplified in his best work, and to what precisely constitutes his distinction as a modern writer, his ability to seize on the Gothic mode and fully realize its implications and possibilities « for the purposes of psychological romance ».

In « Rappaccini's Daughter », Hawthorne's use of Gothic imagery and motifs — as I shall attempt to show in my analysis of the opening pages of the story — in the first place results in a deliberate, conscious principle of artistic organization, corresponding to the creation of a far tighter, more functional structure than we may find, for instance, in the more loosely constructed though spell-binding *Melmoth*, which, among the Gothic romances Hawthorne had read, exerted the most important single influence, both directly and indirectly, on his work. In his most successful tales and romances, Hawthorne achieves aesthetic control of his material, viewing it in the proper perspective that can endow this material with universal significance while leaving its human, immediate relevance intact. « Whether it [in this case, a sketch, but the remark applies to Hawthorne's work in general] have interest, must depend entirely on the sort of view taken by the writer and the mode of execution »<sup>26</sup>.

25. FIEDLER, p. 438. For what Fiedler calls Hawthorne's « shadow characters », it is interesting to see what Hawthorne himself wrote to a critic who had mentioned the shadowy character of the plot in *The Marble Faun*: « As for what you say of the plot I do not agree that it has been left in an imperfect state. The characters of the story come out of obscurity and vanish into it again, like the figures on the slide of a magic lantern; but in their transit, they have served my purpose, and shown all that was essential for them to reveal » (quoted in LUNDBLAD, p. 73).

26. Letter written by Hawthorne to an editor in 1842, quoted in WAGGONER, p. 30.

The germ of « Rappaccini's Daughter », as is known, is to be found in a tale by « an old classic author » (p. 340), Sir Thomas Browne<sup>27</sup>; the tale itself is inserted at a crucial point into Hawthorne's own tale, as a miniature reflection of the entire situation. Hawthorne expanded and elaborated this germ with a great number of suggestions, images, and motifs derived from the Gothic tradition in general, and in particular, in my opinion, from *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820)<sup>28</sup>, which greatly enrich the texture and significance of the story. To my knowledge, nobody has pointed out the parallels that can be established between these late examples of the tradition and « Rappaccini's Daughter », which, I think, may contribute to our understanding of Hawthorne's literary method.

The parallel with *Frankenstein* seems particularly relevant, of course allowing for the many differences between Mrs Shelley's work and Hawthorne's tale. Dr Rappaccini, so often and justly described as a Faustian figure, resembles Victor Frankenstein under many striking respects: both are scientists with strong implications of magic—though, in both cases, never openly stated: rather, the new science is presented as the modern equivalent of the « unhallowed arts » of the old magicians. Both men, pale, emaciated, and sickly in appearance, have become totally absorbed in their studies: for them, science is an end in itself, and they wilfully sever themselves from

27. Cf. JULIAN HAWTHORNE, p. 80. The passage is to be found in SIR THOMAS BROWNE's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, Book VII, Ch. XIV, part of which Hawthorne had quoted in *The American Notebooks*: cf. H. ARLIN TURNER, « Hawthorne's Literary Borrowings », *PMLA*, LI (June 1936), 554.

28. Though I have found no mention of *Frankenstein* among Hawthorne's readings, it is highly probable that he was familiar with this well-known and popular book, often reprinted in the course of the XIX century, and which, incidentally, figured among the books in Melville's possession (cf. N. ARVIN, « Melville and the Gothic Novel », *New England Quarterly*, XXII (March 1949), 34). As to *Melmoth*, Hawthorne himself mentions having read it among other Gothic works, such as *Caleb Williams* and Lewis's *Tales* (cf. LUNDBLAD, p. 35).

society and the world. « I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit », says Frankenstein to his friend while relating his dreadful experiment<sup>29</sup>. The two scientists share the same ambitious goal, creation, and in both cases the results are, as Mrs Shelley said in the Preface to the 1831 edition, « dreadful », adding that such must be the consequences of any effort man makes to substitute himself for the supreme Creator of the world.

Ambition, coldness, and intellectual pride are then the main common traits between Frankenstein and Rappaccini, who are both blinded by their thirst for superhuman power, losing all sense of proportion and deluding themselves that the rest of mankind should be thankful for their endeavours:

Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source ... No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs<sup>30</sup>.

These words of Frankenstein's correspond to Rappaccini's attitude to Beatrice, the daughter of his « pride and triumph », whose gratitude he also seems to expect. It is also interesting to note that both scientists are likened to artists<sup>31</sup>, and that, though explicitly condemned, yet they are not viewed wholly unsympathetically.

The upshot of both ambitious experiments is a « monster », whom they have unjustly doomed, through no fault of its own, to utter loneliness and consequently to despair. The theme of

29. *Frankenstein*, p. 48.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

31. Cf. *Frankenstein*, p. 50, and « Rappaccini's Daughter », p. 349: Frankenstein and also Rappaccini in a way represent both the modern scientist as inventor and the Romantic artist. A. LOMBARDO penetratingly sees the problem of the artist as central to « Rappaccini's Daughter » (« I racconti di Hawthorne », pp. 154-160). On this problem in Hawthorne's fiction, see also B. MELCHIORI, « Scenografie di Hawthorne e il dilemma dell'artista », *SA*, n. 2 1956, 67-81.



loneliness, so characteristic of Hawthorne, is predominant in *Frankenstein*, and it is especially striking that the essential situation is basically the same in both works: a father (for such is, after all, also Frankenstein) who through his « fatal love for science », as Beatrice calls it, isolates his innocent creature from society and the possibility of intercourse with other human beings. Both in Beatrice and Frankenstein's monster this is brought about by their physical attributes, while their souls (in the monster, at least originally) are good, and crave love and affection. The monster confronts his creator with his responsibilities, accusing him of having inflicted this terrible doom on him, barring him from any possibility of happiness: « Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed » — adding that he is « alone, miserably alone »<sup>32</sup>. This is paralleled by Beatrice's words to her father, at the climax of the tale: « My father, whereupon didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child? » (p. 349).

A further trait in common is the creation of a companion for the lonely « monster », possessing the same fearful physical attributes, which is not accomplished in *Frankenstein*, but may well have suggested the idea to Hawthorne for Rappaccini's experiment on Giovanni, whom the scientist has selected as a mate for his creature. Like the monster, Beatrice too had hoped to find somebody who would forgive her her exterior qualities, and love her for the spiritual ones she could show; like his, her hope has been cruelly crushed by the very beings she loved<sup>33</sup>. Finally, for both the only way out of their unbearable situation is death, which they both choose voluntarily.

Again, it seems hardly necessary to stress the obvious differences between *Frankenstein* and « Rappaccini's Daughter »:

32. *Frankenstein*, pp. 101-102.

33. Cf. for instance in Mrs Shelley's romance, the episode of the monster and the Swiss family, whom he calls his « beloved cottagers » (p. 133).

yet, the similarities which I have pointed out (noteworthy are also the persistent strain of allusions to *Paradise Lost* which underlies *Frankenstein* and the Edenic imagery, equally ever-present in Hawthorne), seem significant enough to justify the assumption of a possible direct influence of Mrs Shelley's Gothic story on Hawthorne's tale. The purpose of Mrs Shelley's book was to show that evil has no autonomous existence of its own, independent of the human life on which it preys, but that it is of human origin, a distortion of true human nature<sup>34</sup>; in using the Gothic as a vehicle for her ideas, she was following the example set by her father, who in *Caleb Williams* — greatly admired by Hawthorne — had written a *roman à thèse* which is also a spell-binding tale of flight and pursuit, immersed in a powerful, ambiguous atmosphere of mystery, terror, and evil.

Hawthorne, while agreeing with Mrs Shelley as regards the origin of evil (see for instance « Earth's Holocaust »), does not view man, as we have seen, as innately good. For Hawthorne, and this is his Calvinistic heritage, evil is inextricably meshed in human nature, in this postlapsarian world, and is not brought into existence when man's benevolent aspirations are thwarted and frustrated, as happens with Frankenstein's monster. The plea for human sympathy, which is an important element in *Frankenstein*, is also central to Hawthorne's « message », in « Rappaccini's Daughter » as in most of his work; the basis on which this saving bond with the rest of mankind is to be established is, however, quite the opposite of the liberal rationalist's belief in man's innate goodness. In « Fancy's Show Box », he says: « Man must not disclaim his brotherhood, even with the guiltiest since, though his hand be clean, his heart has surely been polluted by the flitting phantoms of iniquity »<sup>35</sup>. Only when man has reached

34. Cf. *Frankenstein*, Introduction, p. vii.

35. Cf. « Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred! » *The Scarlet Letter*, in *Great Short Works of Hawthorne*, Ch. XXV, p. 222.

self-awareness, that is awareness of the evil which is in himself as well as in others, can he establish a satisfying human relationship and be a link in that « magnetic chain of humanity » which alone can save the individual from tragic isolation.

*Frankenstein* is then no mere tale of terror and horror: here the Gothic convention has been used creatively, to suggest the intimate struggle between good and evil which takes place in the human personality, since Frankenstein and his monster can be seen as objectified parts of a single mind<sup>36</sup>. If Mrs Shelley's book begins to suggest a mythology of the mind, we can affirm that Hawthorne fully took up the suggestion, developing and integrating it with his own, more tragic vision of the paradoxes connected with man's moral nature, thus effectively dramatizing the dynamic inner conflict which he felt to be inherent in man by a subtler, more conscious artistic technique than can be found in *Frankenstein*.

If we now examine « Rappaccini's Daughter » for possible direct borrowings from Maturin's masterpiece, we shall see that here Hawthorne makes a personal and far more aesthetically valid use of some of the themes, techniques, and motifs present in *Melmoth*, a book which undoubtedly fascinated him, as it fascinated Balzac (who wrote, in 1835, *Melmoth Réconcilié*), Baudelaire, and many later writers. It seems to be a constant presence in Hawthorne's mind, whether consciously and uncritically imitated as in *Fanshawe* or « Ethan Brand »<sup>37</sup>,

36. Cf. LOWRY NELSON, JR., « Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel », *YR*, I,II (Dec. 1962), 247.

37. It is difficult to trace clearly a line of development in examining Hawthorne's use of Gothic motifs and situations, since—aside from the youthful, wholly imitative *Fanshawe* (1828), and the late, unfinished romances where Hawthorne was no longer abasto use significantly and control his Gothic material—even after having gained complete mastery of his artistic medium (1835-50), he could still write a melodramatic piece of Gothicism, in the derogatory sense of the term, such as « Ethan Brand » (1851). Notwithstanding a certain undeniable power in the opening pages of the tale, all the clichés we find in this comparatively late work—the lurid background of darkness and flames, the fiendish, « mirthless » laugh and the ter-

or more subtly operating as an unconscious stimulus for his imagination, as I think we can see in «Rappaccini's Daughter».

Aside from the familiar theme of dehumanizing pride, ambition, and isolation, there are in «Rappaccini's Daughter» several elements which invite a comparison with *Melmoth*. The descriptions of Rappaccini's garden and of Beatrice's appearance and beauty strongly recall those of the island (a «garden-land»

rible glance of the self-damned protagonist, the horror that circumfuses his person with an ominous supernatural aura—are taken over bodily from *Melmoth* (cf. DOUBLEDAY, 258-59, who also points out the obvious parallel that can be established between the main plot of Maturin's romance and Hawthorne's tale). Instead of becoming a means of personal artistic expression, these elements are made to serve exclusively an explicit, almost embarrassingly obvious didactic purpose (cf. e. g. Brand's speeches and his «marble heart» found among the ribs of his skeleton). What is lacking here is precisely that undefinable, elusive atmosphere, created through subtly suggested emotions and psychological reactions, which is the essence of Hawthorne's best work. The reader cannot respond with intuitive sympathy to Ethan Brand and his «Unpardonable Sin», and Fiedler (p. 446) is right in observing that in this tale «the intent is tragic, but the tone is false, and what began in terror ends in mere rant».

As to *Fanshawe*—wisely recalled immediately after publication by its author, who destroyed all the copies he could lay hands on—it is little more than an awkward *pastiche* of stock motifs and situations chiefly derived from *Melmoth* (cf. J. S. GOLDSTEIN, «The Literary Source of Hawthorne's Fanshawe», *MLN*, LX (Jan. 1945), 1-8) and, also from Scott's novels: the humorous, realistic tone derived from the latter ill harmonizes with the sensational melodrama of the plot. As A. LOMBARDO rightly points out in his exhaustive and illuminating «Il primo romanzo di Hawthorne» (*La Ricerca del Vero*, Roma, 1961, pp. 145-70), *Fanshawe* is, however, an important document of Hawthorne's artistic development, and must not, therefore, be seen as an unfortunate attempt with no consequences, but rather be placed «all'interno e non all'esterno della storia poetica hawthorniana» (p. 170). *Fanshawe* is interesting insofar as it prefigures some important themes (such as isolation, intellectual pride, and love seen as a regenerative power), certain technical approaches, and character types of H.'s later fiction; but there can be no doubt that it is an immature, crude piece of work totally failing as art, and in my opinion no amount of critical ingenuity, such as displayed in its defence by Stein (pp. 52-54), will ever succeed in «saying» it. M. PRAZ (*Cronache letterarie anglosassoni* (Roma, 1952), II, 139-43) discussing *The Scarlet Letter* rightly observes that Maturin's influence on H. can be clearly traced also here, especially in Chillingworth and in the setting of some scenes (e. g. Ch. XII) (pp. 140, 142).

also associated with Eden), full of luxuriant vegetation and of exotic, vividly coloured flowers, with purple as one of the dominant hues, and of Immalee, the extraordinarily beautiful only inhabitant of the island in the « Tale of the Indians », the longest and perhaps most important episode in *Melmoth*. One may find even verbal echoes in « Rappaccini's Daughter » of those passages which describe the island and Immalee's glowing beauty and fantastic array, entirely consisting of richly coloured flowers<sup>38</sup>.

There is a marked resemblance between the two girls, their environments, and situations, which to my knowledge has never been pointed out: Beatrice, like Immalee, is lonely in her luxuriant garden where she lives in close contact with nature and in complete isolation from the outer world. Both welcome with « simple pleasure » the stranger who breaks their solitude, which before his arrival was not felt to be a cause for suffering: Beatrice says « my heart was torpid then, and therefore quiet » (p. 346), and the same is true for Immalee. They ply him with questions that reveal their complete ignorance about life outside their restricted world (as well as their absolute, « impregnable » innocence), expect his return with eagerness and fall in love with him.

Whether consciously or not, Hawthorne himself underlines the analogy between the two girls when he says, describing Beatrice's first meeting with Giovanni: « She appeared to derive a pure delight from her communion with the youth not unlike what the maiden of a lonely island might have felt conversing with a voyager from the civilized world » (p. 337)<sup>39</sup>. He then goes on to describe her naive questions, so clearly

38. Cf. CHARLES R. MATURIN, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Introd. by W. F. AXTON (Lincoln, Nebr., 1961), pp. 211-13.

39. A. Lombardo sees this passage as suggesting a direct relationship between Beatrice and Miranda (« I racconti di Hawthorne », p. 156, n. 110): while this is probable, it is also possible to see Shakespeare's influence as coexisting with Maturin's, or even, in this particular passage, mediated by *Melmoth*.

evinced her seclusion and such ignorance of the world, that « Giovanni responded as if to an infant », just as Immalee is represented as showing « childish, though intelligent curiosity », and as having a pure spirit and vivid imagination, while Beatrice's thoughts come from « a deep source », and she has « fantasies of a gemlike brilliancy ». Again, as Immalee is likened to a « newborn angel »<sup>40</sup>, Hawthorne makes it clear, as the tale progresses, that Beatrice is a « heavenly angel ».

For both Immalee and Beatrice, death is the result of their love for the stranger (and in both cases a « broken heart » is mentioned); their deaths, though indirectly, are caused by their lovers. Of course, one would not want to push the parallel between Giovanni and Melmoth too far: still, aside from the similarity between the roles they play as regards the two girls, there are other important points in common between the rather ordinary, handsome young man — *l'homme moyen sensuel*, as he has been called — and the tragic figure of Melmoth, self-damned and possessed of supernatural powers, uniting in his person the roles of Faust and of Mephistopheles, the Tempter<sup>41</sup>. For Giovanni, as for Melmoth, tragedy comes through a lack of faith in the redemptive powers of pure, disinterested love, embodied in Beatrice and Immalee. Both, though for different reasons — Giovanni because he is blinded by his egotism; Melmoth because of his cynical despair of human love and compassion — are unable to perceive the existence of ultimate goodness, of the indestructible, uncorruptible reality of the spirit.

Moreover, when in the final scene Giovanni assails Beatrice with his « blighting words » uttered « with fiendish scorn », his impassioned eloquence, his cruel, almost blasphemous sarcasm remind us of Melmoth's satanic, extravagant, and yet often compelling speeches:

40. *Melmoth*, pp. 227, 228.

41. *John Melmoth/Giovanni*: a mere coincidence?

Thy very prayers, as they come from thy lips, taint the atmosphere with death. Yes, yes; let us pray! Let us to church and dip our fingers in the holy water at the portal! They that come after us will perish as by a pestilence! Let us sign crosses in the air! It will be scattering curses abroad in the likeness of holy symbols! (p. 347).

It seems to me that Giovanni here takes on some connotations of the Gothic villain, so strikingly typified by Melmoth; he frowns « darkly » and scowls upon Beatrice, is abrupt, gloomy, bitter, and scornful (cf. pp. 346-47).

A possible source for an incident in « Rappaccini's Daughter », the mark Giovanni finds on his right hand and wrist upon waking up on the day after his first interview with Beatrice (pp. 338-39), may be found in *Melmoth*, Ch. III, when John Melmoth, the descendant of the Wanderer, after dreaming (but, « was it a dream or not? ») of his doomed ancestor, feels « a slight pain in the midst of his right arm. He looked at it, it was black and blue, as from the recent gripe of a strong hand »<sup>42</sup>. One may observe in passing, however, how subtly Hawthorne integrates this small incident into his richly interwoven pattern of cross-references and meanings, reinforcing its significance by the connection established between the purple « gemlike blossoms » and the « purple print » of Beatrice's fingers, as well as by the complex irony of Giovanni's reactions. He « wondered what evil thing had stung him », soon forgetting his pain « in a revery of Beatrice », whom he has now divested of « all the witchery » he had previously endowed her with. Thus the seemingly irrelevant episode is an important though small element contributing to the total effect, while in *Melmoth* it is simply a supernatural event whose only function is to enhance the atmosphere of terror.

The temper of *Melmoth* is violent and modern in its brilliant analysis of the perverse, though most of the effects it

42. *Melmoth*, p. 46.

achieves are usually melodramatic rather than tragic. Maturin has been described as a careless but fine writer, often too lushly poetical in his descriptions<sup>43</sup>; yet at times he achieves a compelling, unique power that redeems the theatricality of many passages. His strong sense of pictorial effects (Eino Railo calls him « a matchless colorist in the realm of terror »)<sup>44</sup> recalls the important link between Gothic fiction and the paintings of Salvator Rosa, Claude Lorrain, and Fuseli, while pointing forward to Hawthorne's carefully arranged compositions and colour contrasts. Maturin makes a most effective use of typical Gothic properties such as underground passages, prisons, gloomy mansions, and many variations on the theme of imprisonment — a central motif in Gothic fiction — which all recur in Hawthorne's work, as for instance in his use of the subterranean galleries of the catacombs in *The Marble Faun* and the « several obscure passages » Giovanni goes through to reach the garden, as well as the old Italian palace and the confinement of the garden itself, in « Rappaccini's Daughter ».

Hawthorne, however, develops and expands the symbolic significance of this motif, as we can see in *The House of the Seven Gables*, where the house, which has been called the closest parallel to the « haunted castle » in American fiction, stands for that « 'dungeon', the individual heart, wherein the emotions of each of its inhabitants are imprisoned »<sup>45</sup>. The unsubstantial cells which imprison man more cruelly and inescapably than the Gothic dungeons from which they derive, are those of egotism, ambition, pride, and lack of self-awareness.

The Gothic convention and its properties had symbolic potentialities hardly realized by the early practitioners of the

43. For Maturin's style, cf. *Melmoth*; ed. with an introduction by DOUGLAS GRANT (Oxford, 1957), pp. xii-xiii *passim*.

44. EINO RAILO, *The Haunted Castle* (London, 1927), p. 156.

45. PORTE, p. 115.



genre, and of which the authors of *Frankenstein* and *Melmoth*, the last and finest flower of the tradition proper, were better able, though not consistently, to make an effective use. Their way of embodying their perception of the existence of evil and of the inescapable loneliness of the individual — trapped by forces which he cannot understand or control though originating, ultimately, in his own mind — is to create an enveloping, almost suffocating atmosphere of wonder and brooding terror, charged with evil, frankly supernatural in *Melmoth* while more ambiguously so in *Frankenstein*. Though sometimes reaching great subtlety, as in the « Tale of the Spaniard » in *Melmoth* — an almost matchless rendering of morbid, though horribly credible, psychological states and sufferings —<sup>46</sup> these late, more gifted Gothic writers were still, on the whole, exploiting the basic devices at their disposal within the existing tradition, which they modified only to a certain extent. They had already discovered, however, if in a less conscious and consistent way than would be devised by later writers, how to give the fantastic a real, almost tangible dimension which made even their most improbable supernatural events capable of emotionally and psychologically involving the reader on a deeper level, leading him to consider internal mental processes and reactions, sharply dramatized in their haunting tales.

It can be thus affirmed that both Mrs Shelley and Maturin point the way to the further, significant developments of the genre as combined with other elements and also transformed by the shaping of a subtler literary technique, such as we can see in the works of Hawthorne and later novelists like Dostoevsky and Faulkner. As one of his critics has said, when Maturin wrote *Melmoth* he identified himself with an essential force in the development of the modern literary mind.

46. MARIO PRAZ in his *The Romantic Agony*, translated by A. Davidson (Oxford, 1951), p. 119, observes that this tale is elaborated « with such a subtlety of penetration into the terrors of the soul as is elsewhere only found in Poe ».

The Gothic influence on Hawthorne's work, as I have attempted to show, is not limited to his taking over and modifying some external motifs and details from the genre, but must be rather viewed as an essential component of his art. Fully aware of the symbolic nature of a fiction which made man's psyche the theatre of the action, Hawthorne successfully assimilated, by a creative process of elaboration, what constituted its most vital aspects: a significant form and certain important technical approaches such as the creation of a suggestive, mysterious atmosphere through its remoteness in space and time, the pictorial technique employed, and the tense dramatic quality of the situations conceived, explored in their psychological implications.

Critics have often observed that Hawthorne « refined » the Gothic material he borrowed, and that he is a « masterly stylist »<sup>47</sup>: these observations, undoubtedly true, in my opinion should however be substantiated by a close analysis of Hawthorne's artistic method, in order to become something more than general statements of little or no characterizing value. The important point is to see in what his often celebrated « refinement » of the genre and « mastery » of style precisely consist: I shall therefore analyze the opening pages of « Rappaccini's Daughter », trusting that it will serve the purpose of showing concretely what Hawthorne actually does with the material and suggestions he has derived from his Gothic sources, whether consciously imitated and adopted or unconsciously operating as a powerful catalyst for his imagination.

« Rappaccini's Daughter » has a highly organized structure which irresistibly, through a skilfully managed crescendo, builds up « in ever-lessening circles » (p. 333) to the swift, dramatic climax. What has been observed of *The Scarlet Letter* — that the romance in rightness of form and clarity of devel-

47. Cf. for the latter observation the Introduction to *Great Short Works of Hawthorne* by F. C. CREWS, p. vii.

opment is closer to seventeenth-century drama (e.g. Racine's) than to the nineteenth-century novel, — can also be applied to « Rappaccini's Daughter », which has a dramatic pattern that can be easily divided into sections equivalent to acts and scenes, all obeying a rigorous internal law of development. The precision and the careful rhythmic effects Hawthorne achieves here, in the movement and juxtaposition of persons, places, and events<sup>48</sup>, give the tale a fluid life of its own, and his use of thematic *leit-motiv* and counterpoint also calls to mind a musical composition. The whole tale has been called « a fugue in black »<sup>49</sup>; aside from the fact that I would rather call it « a fugue in purple » since the dominant chromatic note is purple, the metaphor well suggests two of the most remarkable characteristics of Hawthorne's technique in this tale, his use of a rhythmic, musical pattern, and of vivid colour.

Hawthorne's colours, which play such an important part in the total effect achieved in « Rappaccini's Daughter », come from the Gothic palette, as well as his skilful use of *chiaroscuro*: but in his imagination they have become endowed with a moral significance<sup>50</sup>, which however is not superimposed on, or detachable from the fabric of the tale, but inseparably fused with it. Thus, here purple is the colour of complexity and evil, white of goodness and simplicity<sup>51</sup>, and we may notice how purple is constantly associated with Beatrice in the beginning, while later, as her angelic qualities are more and more stressed, we find, for instance, « the pure whiteness of Beatrice's image » (p. 344). But these colours do not simply function as vehicles for the meaning they stand for, as they would do in medieval

48. Cf. McCABE, 216.

49. Cf. H. G. FAIRBANKS, *The Lasting Loneliness of N. Hawthorne* (Albany, N. Y., 1965), p. 105. Fairbanks calls it « in black » as he sees the story centred on Rappaccini's figure.

50. Cf. FIEDLER, p. 434.

51. Cf. R. H. FOGLE, *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark* (Norman, Okla., 1964), p. 97.

allegory; they are also at the same time consciously used to create a picture of rich, suggestive power.

In the opening sentences, Hawthorne sets the stage with great economy, introducing the young man who will be one of the four main characters, and the locale. He immediately removes the action from actuality by his choice of the setting, a half-real, half-imaginary Italy (traditionally associated with exoticism and mystery since Elizabethan times<sup>52</sup> and the setting of many a Gothic romance), as well as by his vague time indication, « very long ago », further reinforced by the brief description of Giovanni's lodgings, « an old edifice », and the mention of the family « long since extinct », who used to occupy it. The past is again recalled by the allusion to one of the ancestors of the family, pictured by Dante in his *Inferno*<sup>53</sup>. The atmosphere thus established is one of remoteness in space and time, of antiquity and gloom (the words « old » and « gloomy » recur twice in the description of the palace, a version of the « haunted castle »), and Giovanni is presented as homesick and lonely in the old, strange city.

52. « Rappaccini's Daughter » and *The Marble Faun* are the only two works by Hawthorne with an Italian setting. Aside from the Elizabethan and Gothic traditions, where Italy was often chosen as the background of the action, as well as the Dantesque associations, Hawthorne may have also been influenced in his choice by one of his first readings, *God's Revenge Against the Crying and Execrable Sin of Murder!*, a translation from the Italian containing « scores and scores of tales, each more bloody and ingenious than the others ». (JULIAN HAWTHORNE, pp. 36-7). Hawthorne read these gory stories at a very early and impressionable age: when all is said, however, about the dark and gruesome associations Italy might evoke in Hawthorne's mind, one may conclude, with JOEL PORTE (p. 138) that for him « Romance darkness ... is not of Italy, but of the soul ».

53. This early mention of Dante's *Divina Commedia* serves the double function of helping to establish the atmosphere and of suggesting, to someone « not unlearned in the great poem », the analogy between Dante's Beatrice and Beatrice Rappaccini, which will be further developed later on in the tale. For the possible association of Beatrice also with Beatrice Cenci, see, among others, OLIVER EVANS, « Allegory and Incest in 'Rappaccini's Daughter' », *NCF*, XIX (Sept. 1964), 185-195 and R. L. WHITE, « Rappaccini's Daughter, The Cenci and the Cenci Legend », *Studi Americani*, n. 14 (1968), 63-86.

There is little direct description of Giovanni — one is reminded of George Meredith's words on Hawthorne's characterization: « ... the sentience, rather than the drawings which he gives you of his characters »<sup>54</sup> — and we learn indirectly of his remarkable beauty of person through the way it affects old Lisabetta (and again, later, through the way it strikes Beatrice [cf. p. 329] when she first sees him). Lisabetta, the old caretaker, is presented as a slightly humorous figure — again a feature we may find in Walpole and Mrs Radcliffe; she is a secondary character, who however has the important function of first directing Giovanni's attention towards the garden, and later on will be the means by which the young man will enter it.

The garden, in many respects the real protagonist of the story as well as its chief centre of action, is first introduced when Giovanni carelessly looks out of the window and sees it under the sunshine. His, and therefore the reader's, first impression is that « the variety of plants » it contained « seemed to have been cultivated with exceeding care » (p. 320). We are immediately made to feel that there is something ominous connected with it by Lisabetta's emphatic disclaimer that the garden might belong to the house. Again indirectly, through the old woman's words, the other protagonists of the story are introduced: the first to be mentioned is Dr Rappaccini, « the famous doctor », with the suggestion that there might be something uncanny about his science — « it is said that he distils these plants into medicines that are as potent as a charm » (p. 320). Lisabetta is reporting hearsay, thereby making the suggestion vaguer and apparently harmless: yet the seed is skilfully implanted into Giovanni's mind, even if he does not seem to pay any attention to her words and their implications, that there might be something strange and indistinctly dangerous about the doctor and his daughter (briefly

54. GEORGE MEREDITH, *Letters*, ed. by W. M. Meredith (New York, 1912), p. 168.

mentioned as « the signora ») gathering the « strange flowers » of their garden.

With Lisabetta's departure, what we may term the prologue or the *ouverture* of the action is completed: Hawthorne, with a minimum of words and details, has managed to set the stage and give us the essential information to get his story going, and now the focus is concentrated on the garden. Giovanni is our camera eye: the garden is progressively revealed to the reader through his eyes and impressions, as he takes in more and more details of the scene beneath his window and reacts to it.

The first thing that catches Giovanni's attention is the ruined fountain in the centre. One may observe in passing that ruins are, as is known, a typical Gothic motif (and Hawthorne has often remarked on their being necessary for the growth of romance). Yet here, as elsewhere in his work, this essentially picturesque element is charged with significant metaphorical overtones: as we can see for instance in *The Scarlet Letter* (the « ruined wall » of man's soul) and in *The Marble Faun* with its almost obsessive insistence on ruin and decay, where Hawthorne explicitly speaks of « a ruin in the heart », his ruins are nearly always used to suggest the realm of the heart.

It is Giovanni himself that sees a symbolic meaning in the shattered marble fragments of the fountain and the unheeding, unceasing gush of water: he feels as if

the fountain were an immortal spirit, that sung its song unceasingly without heeding the vicissitudes around it, while one century embodied it in marble and another scattered the perishable garniture on the soil. (p. 321).

Thus this symbol (a recurrent one in Hawthorne) is organically incorporated into the perceptions of one of the protagonists, and takes on a concrete dimension of psychological reality, instead of being an abstract concept which must be intellectually comprehended or made explicit by authorial comment:

here it is, instead, apprehended by the reader through Giovanni's own reactions.

Now Giovanni's observation moves on to the plants. The leaves are « gigantic », the flowers « gorgeously magnificent »: the redundancy of this expression effectively conveys Giovanni's impression, though not explicitly stated, that all this beauty and magnificence is almost excessive. The description of the plants around the pool of the fountain leads up to « one shrub in particular », with its resplendent purple blossoms, which Giovanni associates with the lustre and richness of gems (and the image will recur throughout the tale in connection with the flowers)<sup>55</sup>. The plants, then, are associated both with mineral and, immediately after, animal life, as the words that follow suggest that they have more than vegetable life: « the soil was *peopled* with plants and herbs », and « some of them *crept, serpent-like, or climbed* on high » (p. 321; italics mine); one finally « had wreathed itself round the statue of Vertumnus »<sup>56</sup>. All these verbs and the simile « serpent-like », though naturally enough springing

55. Some critics have pointed out some similarities in characterization and situation that connect Hawthorne and Spenser (cf. e.g. RANDALL STEWART, « Hawthorne and *The Faerie Queene* », *PQ*, XII (April, 1933), 196-206), and in particular the analogy between Rappaccini's garden and the Bower of Bliss (cf. HERBERT A. LEIBOWITZ, « Hawthorne and Spenser: Two Sources », *AL*, 30 (Jan. 1959), 459-466). Leibowitz, however, while remarking on the superficiality and vagueness of other critics, is rather superficial himself in drawing the quite obvious parallel between the two gardens: he fails, for instance, to notice how Hawthorne's insistence on the « gemlike » quality of the flowers recalls the fact that in the Bower of Bliss the plants and flowers are made of precious stones and metals cunningly wrought and painted to simulate « natures work ».

56. For the symbolic significance of the statue of Vertumnus, see WALTON RAWLS, « Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's Daughter' », *Explicator*, 15 (Apr. 1957), item 47, who observes that « For those who know Ovid's myth of Vertumnus and Pomona, the statue acts as a preview of the story's broad outline », adding that the chief contrast between the classical myth and Hawthorne's story lies in the different ending—happy for the two Ovidian lovers, tragic for Beatrice and Giovanni.

to the mind, suggest almost a will, an intelligence of some sort on the part of the plants.

The scene which is thus progressively revealed to Giovanni is apparently static, yet there is the suggestion of the hidden, mysterious life animating it that creates implicitly, subtly, a sense of suspense and magic which gains most of its force and poetic validity from the very obliqueness of its presentation and the lack of overt supernatural elements.

The traditional contrast between art and nature implied by the « urns rich with old carving » containing the plants, can be seen as ironical: here not only the urns are the product of human art, but — as Giovanni and the reader will later learn — also the plants are « artificial », man-made. Giovanni's first impression of an « exceeding care » bestowed on the plants is now confirmed, unconsciously reinforced by what Lisabetta had told him about the doctor, who is felt as an invisible, disembodied presence giving them assiduous care: Giovanni refers to him as to « the scientific mind that fostered them ». This presence is now revealed to the young man as he becomes aware of a person at work in the garden, first through the rustling of leaves, and then when Rappaccini emerges into view. His appearance, thus carefully prepared, has an effectiveness that testifies to Hawthorne's sense of dramatic structure. Rappaccini is seen by Giovanni as « emaciate, sallow and sickly-looking »: in the bright sunshine and dominant purple tone of the garden, his « scholar's garb of black » stands in sharp pictorial relief. Hawthorne makes throughout the tale a skilful use of colour contrasts, besides employing his recurrent one of light against dark — exemplified here in the contrast between the shadow in which Giovanni is placed at his window in the « gloomy mansion », and the brilliant sunshine outside — thus achieving a powerful and somewhat impressionistic effect<sup>57</sup>.

57. Cf. LELAND SCHUBERT, *Hawthorne the Artist. Fine-Art Devices in Fiction*, (New York, 1963), p. 30.



To Giovanni, Rappaccini's intellectual and cultivated countenance « could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart » (p. 322). This impression on his part, joined with the intentness which he notices in Rappaccini's examination of the « vegetable existences » in his garden, foreshadows the later description of the doctor's character which Giovanni will hear from Baglioni's lips, lending it credibility as it confirms what the young man himself, as yet an almost unbiased observer, had seen. For the first time, we now have an explicit response on Giovanni's part to what he has been observing: he is impressed « most disagreeably » by Rappaccini's caution and his avoidance of the plants, which suggest to the young student a series of powerful images, in a crescendo of disagreeable, frightful associations: Rappaccini makes him think of one

walking among malignant influences, savage beasts, or deadly snakes, or evil spirits, which, should he allow them one moment of licence, would wreak upon him some terrible fatality (p. 322).

The previous intimation of a hidden, animal rather than purely vegetable, life in the garden, takes now visual shape (beasts, snakes) of a repulsive and dangerous nature (savage, deadly), till the third image, « evil spirits », while representing the most appropriate one for what Giovanni feels to be « malignant influences », adds to the danger he senses present in the garden, a supernatural dimension, though nothing so far seems to exceed « the limits of ordinary nature ».

The young man now asks himself: « Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? And this man, with such a perception of harm in what his own hands caused to grow, — was he the Adam? » (p. 322). Again indirectly, through Giovanni's psychological and emotional reactions, Hawthorne has established a parallel, this time a Biblical one, which gives the garden a mythic, symbolic dimension, fully justified on an aesthetic plane. Here Hawthorne has successfully avoided the abstractness which inevitably follows when

he states the meaning of his symbols explicitly, in his own person, by the imaginative re-creation of a deeply suggestive atmosphere.

The growth of the shrubs is now described as «luxuriant», an adjective which in Hawthorne, as F. C. Crews has observed, always has a connotation of unnaturalness, and the dangerousness of the beautiful purple shrub is made apparent by the mask Rappaccini puts on when approaching it, suggesting to Giovanni the impression that «all this beauty did but conceal a deadlier malice» — a subtle anticipation of what his feelings will be upon first seeing Beatrice.

The girl is, like Rappaccini, first revealed to Giovanni through sound — her rich voice, which evokes exotic images in his mind, producing in him a singular effect of synesthesia that, while effectively conveying the alluring seductiveness which characterizes her person, is a happy stroke of psychological insight into the reactions of the young man. It is also interesting to note, incidentally, that synesthesia is, as is well-known, one of the most typical aspects of the Decadent sensibility, already to be found in a number of writers, like Gautier («... j'entendais le bruit des couleurs. Des sons verts, blancs, jaunes m'arrivaient par ondes parfaitement distinctes»), and Baudelaire in his famous «Correspondances». Even *before* seeing Beatrice, Giovanni thinks of «deep hues of purple» and of «perfumes heavily delectable» — he unconsciously («he did not know why») already associates the girl with the flowers in the garden, and more specifically with the magnificent, but dangerous purple shrub.

When she enters the garden through «a sculptured portal» (the sculptured portal is always mentioned in the tale in connection with her entrances or exits — perhaps as a further reinforcement of the analogy between the plant in the carved urn and Beatrice), Giovanni is first struck by the richness of her dress which already invites a comparison with the flowers. «Rich» recurs five times in thirty-two lines in this context, three times to describe the quality of her voice, once for her

dress and once further to enhance her similarity, in Giovanni's eyes, to the flowers, thus emphasizing the aura of opulent, Oriental fascination that emanates from the girl. Her vivid beauty and intense vitality have a « luxuriance » which recalls the « luxuriant growth » of the shrub: yet it is « bound down and compressed and girdled tensely » by her « virgin zone ». The three verbs and final adverb almost suggest the effort with which her virgin nature — presumably, it is her youth that makes Giovanni think of it — prevents her physical attributes from being « too much »: one feels that « too much » here for Giovanni means « immodest », or even « unchaste », just as later on, when he finds himself in the garden and begins « a critical examination of the plants », « their gorgeousness seemed to him fierce, passionate, and even unnatural » (p. 334).

Prepared by these carefully orchestrated images, now comes the explicit identification of the girl with the « magnificent plant »:

the impression which the fair stranger made upon him was as if here were another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones (p. 323).

The comparison has grown so gradually and organically from the young man's perceptions and sensations that the reader accepts it without finding it far-fetched or extravagant, though an impalpable sense of weirdness is suggested by the characteristically qualifying remark preceding it: « Yet Giovanni's fancy must have grown morbid while he looked down into the garden ». Although emotionally and intuitively right, this identification girl/flower is somewhat morbid, recalling « those shapeless half ideas which throng the dim region beyond the daylight of our perfect consciousness » (p. 338).

The comparison with the purple blossoms, first brought about by Beatrice's rich beauty, automatically takes on a connotation of her potential danger, as yet only stemming from her resemblance to the plant, which Giovanni knows to be

dangerous. It is only after Giovanni has sensed that she too is « to be touched with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask », that he actually observes the girl approaching and touching the plant without showing the fear and caution that her father had evinced. With Rappaccini's words to her, explicitly mentioning the deadliness of the shrub and consigning it to her sole care; with Beatrice's answer, so strikingly confirming Giovanni's « morbid » impression of her being the human sister of the flowers — and, moreover, clearly equating the perfumed (and poisonous) « breath » (again the shrub is seen as a living being) with the « breath of life » for her — the basic starting situation is revealed to Giovanni. His perceptions have supplied him with almost all the clues to « the ugly mystery » which he will later deem « the riddle of his own existence » (p. 334), but though sensing its presence he is unable to solve it. Giovanni's perceptions, as well as the scene before his eyes, have an increasing dream-like quality:

Night was already closing in; oppressive exhalations seemed to proceed from the plants and steal upward past the open window; and Giovanni, closing the lattice, went to his couch and dreamed of a rich flower and beautiful girl. Flower and maiden were different, and yet the same, and fraught with some strange peril in either shape (p. 324).

The dream, with beautiful, concentrated economy, summarizes in an emblematic, and yet psychologically motivated form, the two main elements of the scene Giovanni has observed which have most deeply impressed him, emphasizing their intimate relationship and objectifying the sense of « a strange peril » in two concrete and complementary images.

The passage where Giovanni, after his dream, sees the garden in the light of the morning, which brings everything within « the limits of ordinary experience », and is « inclined to take a most rational view of the matter » (p. 324-25) disregarding the sense of its mysteriousness which the half light of dusk had made so real to him, is subtly ironical.

« A most rational view of the matter » is totally inadequate to understand « the symbolic language » of the garden, which he had almost deciphered through the irrational immediacy of his sensations and feelings. Giovanni mistakes for reality what in fact, paradoxically, is appearance: his perception, if garbled and unconscious, of at least part of the « true » reality, vividly embodied in his dream, is pushed back beyond the boundaries of his consciousness.

The whole scene in the garden, as well as Giovanni's dream and morning reflections have been presented with a skilful accretion of details, each gradually unfolding itself and enriched by « reminiscences and associations » which both look back at previous slight indications and forward to the course and climax of the tale. A rich and complex texture of meanings, associations, and cross-references is thus achieved, in a profoundly suggestive interplay where each detail, each nuance is meaningful in itself, while respectively gaining from, and giving significance to the whole fabric. As the tale progresses, the themes and motifs of both the overture and the first scene are taken up and developed, till every thread comes together in the climax, sudden and yet, given the premises, inevitable.

Leslie Stephen, who greatly admired Hawthorne's fiction, recognizing its essential poetic nature in its perception and re-creation of « the thoughts and emotions that inhabit the twilight of the mind »<sup>58</sup>, in a little-known passage which anticipates the views of some of Hawthorne's most perceptive critics, such as Matthiessen and Waggoner, grasps the essential quality of his art, as exemplified, in our case, in « Rappaccini's Daughter »:

58. LESLIE STEPHEN, *Hours in a Library*, 4 vols. (New York, 1904), I, 28.

Some central truth should be embodied in every work of fiction, which cannot be compressed into a definite formula, but which acts as the animating and informing principle, determining the main lines of the structures and affecting even its most trivial details<sup>59</sup>.

Stephen adds that « Critics who try to extract it as a formal moral, present us only with nothing but the outside husk of dogma », as it cannot be packed into a « single portable formula ».

Thus to me it may be misleading to say, as for instance N. F. Doubleday does, that « The Gothic furnished Hawthorne with a means for representing the sin of pride »<sup>60</sup>, as such a statement is more suggestive of a purely allegorical technique which could only result in abstractness, than of Hawthorne's actual, far subtler and more complex method. True, often enough it is Hawthorne himself who seems to be offering the reader a « single portable formula » in the « morals » which he unfelicitously attaches to some of his « explorations of that dusky region, our common nature » pursued « as well by the tact of sympathy as by the light of observation »<sup>61</sup>, as for instance happens also in « Rappaccini's Daughter » — « ... and thus the poor victim of man's ingenuity and of thwarted nature, and of the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom, perished there » (p. 350), — but to take these explicit morals as embodying the whole « meaning » of Hawthorne's art seems to be tantamount to denying the complexity of his ethic and artistic vision. When Waggoner observes that Hawthorne's sensibility, his creativity, could respond fully only to moral values<sup>62</sup>, he is on the whole right: the process described by Doubleday, however, suggests rather what hap-

59. *Ibid.*, III, 4.

60. DOUBLEDAY, 261.

61. *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales* (Boston and New York, 1892), Preface, p. 386.

62. WAGGONER, p. 44.

pens in the sketches — where in general the allegorical intention is not instinct with emotion, and therefore results in a static, colourless picture, a « still life », or an emblem hardly evr coming alive — than what we have in the great tales and romances.

In discussing *Frankenstein* and *Melmoth*, I have already pointed out some of the differences between these works and Hawthorne's vision and art: some final considerations are now necessary to conclude my study.

The tendency of the Gothic romances had often been towards the abnormal, the perverse, the frankly supernatural, used for the creation of a hectic, unwholesome atmosphere full of ambiguous suspense and implications, where passions raged and superhuman or subhuman characters acted their parts — presented, as Fiedler has observed, sometimes as fully motivated characters in the analytic sense, sometimes as mere projections of unconscious guilt or fear<sup>63</sup>. Hawthorne's tone in «Rappaccini's Daughter», as elsewhere in his best work, is more subdued, elegiac, and thus more subtly suggestive: his myth has a human dimension which awakens the reader's intuitive sympathy for the tragic plight of its characters, whose essential humanity is made real by the exactitude with which Hawthorne explores and depicts their psychological traits and reactions. The supernatural, ambiguously suggested but never exploited for sensational effects, gives an added imaginative depth: Hawthorne's use of this element in this tale is a subtle way of suggesting a doubt of its literal existence — in a delicate balance between revelation and concealment — even while asking for imaginative assent. This can be seen most notably exemplified in the recurring qualifications of Giovanni's impressions: his fancy « must have grown morbid », he « did not fail to observe, or imagine, an analogy between the beautiful girl and the gorgeous shrub » (p. 328); « now,

63. Cf. FIEDLER, p. 141.

unless Giovanni's draughts of wine had bewildered his senses, a singular incident occurred ». The incident is introduced in the same way: « It appeared to Giovanni — but, at the distance from which he gazed, he could scarcely have seen anything so minute », and the young man, after witnessing the death of the « small, orange-coloured reptile » (another vivid spot of bright colour), says to himself: « Am I awake? Have I my senses? ». And again, shortly after: « Now, here it could not be but that Giovanni's eyes deceived him. Be as it might, he fancied... ». The scene closes on the same note:

it seemed to Giovanni ... that his beautiful bouquet was already beginning to wither in her grasp. It was an idle thought: there could be no possibility of distinguishing a faded flower from a fresh one at so great a distance (p. 330).

This impalpability, this ambiguity greatly enhance the mysterious suggestiveness of the tale, and are a conscious artistic device: improving on the technique he had essentially derived from *Melmoth* (which epitomizes the Gothic tradition), Hawthorne unobtrusively merges the material and immaterial worlds to achieve complete poetic acceptance, amplifying the symbolic possibilities of the genre in both their metaphysical and psychological implications<sup>64</sup>.

Hawthorne, moreover, is less interested in the greatness missed by his Faustian figures than he is in their guilt and its consequences, that is in the way it affects themselves as well as their victims. Their eventual theological damnation, however, is not focused upon, as Hawthorne's main concern is for the progressive deterioration of their psyche while they still retain their place in this world, and it is in this sense that one may say that he has imaginatively re-created the Calvinistic sense of sin: but in him it has no religious signif-

64. Cf. STEIN, pp. 44, 45.



icance, it is a psychological state that is explored.<sup>65</sup> In « Rappaccini's Daughter », to limit ourselves to one example only, Hawthorne's complex, carefully interwoven structure provides a suggestive emotional context for the « sins » he exposes and explicitly condemns — pride, coldness of heart, egotism and lack of faith — thus ultimately disregarding the intellectualistic logic of a rigidly constructed metaphysical frame of reference in favour of the « truth of the human heart », that « foul cavern » he explores with the fidelity and profound insight of a conscious artist sensitively aware of the painful paradoxes inherent in the human condition.

Hawthorne is always more concerned with what people do think, rather than with what they should think<sup>66</sup>, with the psychological effect of an event rather than with the event itself: as Harry Levin has observed, « the analytic approach of the psychologist is anticipated by the synthetic insight of the romancer »<sup>67</sup>, and one could apply to Hawthorne the words uttered by a character in *Melmoth* about himself, that emotions are his events. Facts in his fiction, notwithstanding his sometimes intricate plots derived from the eventful Gothic romances, are always far less important than the emotional and psychological reactions they produce in the characters, and indeed they may be said to interest Hawthorne only as representing the outward types of what happens in the « inward sphere » of man.

It is in this context of ethic and aesthetic ideas that one may isolate one of the main themes of « Rappaccini's Daughter », the moral choice which man can avoid facing only at the price of falling below the limits that define his essential humanity and his individual personality: and here the analogy with Kierkegaard's position — especially as stated in *Enten* —

65. Cf. Q. D. LEAVIS, « Hawthorne as Poet », in *Hawthorne. A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 37.

66. Cf. G. D. JOSIPOVICI, « Hawthorne's Modernity », *Critical Quarterly*, 8 (Winter 1966), 355.

67. HARRY LEVIN, *The Power of Blackness* (New York, 1958), p. 71.

*Eller* — is particularly striking, since the Danish thinker also stresses the necessity of a moral choice which alone defines man's personality, freeing it from banality and irrelevance. The Gothic romancers had aimed at freeing man's imagination from the banality of everyday life and experience: Hawthorne, like Kierkegaard<sup>68</sup>, aimed at awakening man's conscience, reacting against the banality of everyday morality and the lazy avoidance of crucial moral issues. Giovanni's testing ordeal is at once his individual tragedy — since he is not able to overcome his self-absorption (a characteristic trait of immaturity) and establish a satisfying human relationship — and the inescapable one which man must face in order to progress from adolescence to maturity, from ignorance of himself and of others to conscience and understanding of his fellow-beings, from untested innocence to knowledge and acceptance of the human condition.

I have attempted to show, in the foregoing pages, by what means Hawthorne has achieved the magic and mythical atmosphere, charged with lyric intensity, which is, to me, the chief reason for the inclusion of « Rappaccini's Daughter » among his most successful works apart from any interpretation of its ultimate « meaning ». Thus in my opinion Austin Warren's remark, « The tale [« Rappaccini's Daughter »] falls below the author's highest art by virtue of its false symbolism. The physical and the psychic do not correspond »<sup>69</sup>, cannot be viewed as a balanced estimate of the tale, since it seems to identify Hawthorne's « highest art » only with his achieving a perfect correspondence between the allegorical core of his inspiration and the symbols he creates. While it is true that an exact correlation between the psychic and the physical may be partly lacking in « Rappaccini's Daughter » as regards

68. As previously indicated, the parallel I have drawn between Kierkegaard and Hawthorne is of course limited only to those aspects I have pointed out.

69. AUSTIN WARREN, *Hawthorne*, American Writers Series (New York, 1934), p. 267.

the ambivalent significance of the poison present in the garden, in Beatrice, and in Giovanni, this however, in my view, does not diminish the aesthetic validity of the tale, as otherwise critical evaluation would be reduced to little more than the fitting together of an allegorical jigsaw puzzle. Scores of critics, indeed, have been unable to resist the temptation of giving yet another « reading », *the* « reading » in fact, of this complex story, often displaying remarkable ingenuity in the attempt of unravelling its by now notorious « ambiguities ». To be sure, an understanding of the various levels of symbolic meanings present in the tale is helpful, as, moreover, the explicit moral at the end — an example of what a critic has aptly defined Hawthorne's « platitudinous last paragraph »<sup>70</sup> — has rightly been indicated as misleading if taken to embody the only, or even the main, point of the story<sup>71</sup>. On the other hand, however, the tale has, so to speak, a powerful imaginative autonomy, and the very variety of the interpretations one is presented with, often more ingenious than convincing, is a further proof that it does not ultimately need to rely on the labelling of its characters with their supposed allegorical identities, or on the decoding of Hawthorne's

70. CLARK GRIFFITH, « Caves and Cave Dwellers: The Study of a Romantic Image », *JEGP*, 62 (July 1963), 567.

71. Cf. WAGGONER, p. 118. It would be too long to list here the various readings of « Rappaccini's Daughter » offered by a great number of critics, and I shall therefore limit myself to mentioning some of the interpretations of the possible theme or themes embodied in it. As already indicated (see n. 31), A. LOMBARDO is in my opinion right when he affirms: « ... dietro la vicenda di Rappaccini non è arduo scorgere, più chiaramente che in altri racconti, la vicenda dell'artista, e, dietro i suoi fiori, non è arduo individuare i caratteri dell'opera d'arte » (« I racconti di Hawthorne », pp. 154-5). ZOLLA, on the other hand, states that the theme of « Rappaccini's Daughter », as well as of many other stories by Hawthorne, is « l'eccesso di analisi come malattia mortale » (p. 258): while this can be rightly seen as a *leitmotiv* in Hawthorne's fiction, I fail to see it as the main theme of this particular tale. C. PAGETTI, in his excellent, well-documented *Il Senso del Futuro. La Fantascienza nella Letteratura Americana* (Roma, 1970), sees this tale as centered on the contrast between reality and unreality, concluding: « Giovanni causa

« message » in order to evoke in the reader that response, that « willing suspension of disbelief » which constitutes the aim and achievement of nineteenth-century poetry.

Hawthorne is a poet in his insight into the inner workings of the mind, in his concern for ultimate questions of universal significance and the essentials of human experience, and in his ability to convey his insight and concern in images which have both symbolic reverberations and the vitality of a reality imaginatively re-created. Thus what Hawthorne called his « fantastic imagery » (Preface, p. 318), and has been described as « Gothic extravagance and tortuous symbolism »<sup>72</sup>, when functional also on an aesthetic plane, as happens in his best work, has a coherence and suggestive power which derive from the emotional logic of his individual imagination.

Hawthorne's basic concern with the strange, the halfknown, the dimly seen, which is most paradigmatically exemplified in « The Haunted Mind », as, among others, H. H. Waggoner has pointed out, leads him to the exploration of that « dusky region », « the depths of our common nature », and the re-creation of a « neutral territory, somewhere between the real

inavvertitamente la morte di Beatrice proprio perché il giardino velenoso è per lui sempre un sogno», (p. 89). It seems to me, however, that if at first Giovanni as thought it might be a dream, later, once he realizes he too has been contaminated, he sees the evil garden and Beatrice (whom he believes to be her father's accomplice in luring him) as only too real: it is precisely this that precipitates the tragic ending. Chapters III and IV of Pagetti's book contain many interesting and acute observations on Hawthorne whom Pagetti views, with Brockden Brown and Poe, as a forerunner of modern science fiction: however, I should not place on the same plane, as the springs of respectively Brown's, Poe's and Hawthorne's art, « la scoperta scientifica che ... evoca una nuova realtà » and « l'impulso della nuova visione romantica » (p. 88) which in Schelling had already been stimulated by the discoveries of magnetism and electricity): science, with its mysterious, uncanny connotations is a means for these three writers, not a source of inspiration. Hawthorne, generally speaking, and in particular in « Rappaccini's Daughter », uses science as the outward type of a satanic, dehumanizing intellectual pride. The emotional overtones of the perception of the mystery encompassing us are quite different from those of a sceptical, relativistic attitude.

72. McCABE, 214.

world and fairy-land », located, that is, between the Actual and the Imaginary. When, as is the case in « Rappaccini's Daughter », the Actual and the Imaginary meet and compenetrates each other, and when, moreover, the « warmer light » of emotion

...mingles itself with the cold spirituality of the moonbeams, and communicates, as it were, a heart and sensibilities of human tenderness to the forms which fancy summons up<sup>73</sup>,

Hawthorne achieves that anti-realistic « heightened reality » which is the aim of romance. He thus effectively conveys to the reader the sense — which is the spring of his best fiction — of how mysterious, dream-like, and unsubstantial outward, matter-of-fact « reality » is, and conversely, how very real the mystery encompassing human existence from every point, and the « dim shapes » that haunt the « inward sphere » of man's psyche are. While continuously suggesting a landscape of the mind, in this tale Hawthorne also creates a vivid, intensely alive background for the drama, at once individual and universal, of the « mortal agents » involved. To the description of the garden and of Beatrice one may well apply what Hawthorne himself says, in « The Birthmark », about the images Aylmer shows to Georgiana with a sort of magic lantern:

The scenery and the figures of actual life were perfectly represented, but with that bewitching yet indescribable difference which always makes a picture, an image, or a shadow so much more attractive than the original<sup>74</sup>.

Is not this « bewitching yet indescribable difference » the essential characteristic of poetry, Baudelaire's « sorcellerie évocatoire »?

We may conclude, then, that in « Rappaccini's Daughter » Hawthorne showed how his imagination, stimulated by his

73. « The Customs House », in *Great Short Works of Hawthorne*, p. 33.

74. « The Birthmark », *ibid.*, p. 307.

awareness of crucial moral issues and catalyzed by the Gothic which he here made so thoroughly and effectively into a personal medium of artistic expression, could operate to create a complex, profoundly original, and satisfying work of art, of haunting power and great significance. In this tale he has been able to achieve the embodiment of his artistic creed as expressed — mainly in metaphorical form — in his Prefaces: since his aim is to make us aware of the shallow reality of the phenomenal world, Hawthorne deliberately does not give his characters and settings the relief they would have in a novel, as his message is that the true reality is of the soul. On the other hand, however, this message would be abstractly allegorical if the characters did not have the psychological and emotional concreteness of living beings, which « converts them from snow-images into men and women »<sup>75</sup>; this would also happen if the setting, though lacking that minute definiteness which is given by naturalism, did not possess a suggestive quality of its own, evoked through the «fantastic imagery». In this delicate balance between the Actual and the Imaginary, which Hawthorne achieves in « Rappaccini's Daughter », his art lives and is fully realized.

GABRIELLA LA REGINA

75. « The Customs House », p. 33.