

Nathaniel Hawthorne's Ecophilosophy in "Rappaccini's Daughter"

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This paper examines Nathaniel Hawthorne's ecophilosophy in "Rappaccini's Daughter" by focusing on his various representations of the natural environment and the human relationship to it. It suggests that the story reflects his belief that nature is divinely arranged and that humanity should protect rather than manipulate its systems. From his perspective, the disruption of natural systems would not only cause the extinction of many animal species but also endanger human life and existence on earth. The paper further suggests that Hawthorne promotes a view of nature as a living organism whose entities possess souls and spirits. Their capacity to have feelings and emotions makes them entitled to moral respect and consideration. In its study of the author's environmental values and ethics, the essay claims that Hawthorne advocates the idea that human beings do not occupy a privileged position in the universe and that they are not superior or more important than nonhumans. In contrast to the Biblical vision of humankind, he portrays humans as weak and flawed creatures that cannot attain divine perfection. For these reasons, the paper asserts that "Rappaccini's Daughter" exhibits Hawthorne's deep ecological awareness and underlines his stature as a pioneer of American literary environmentalism.

Keywords

Nathaniel Hawthorne; "Rappaccini's Daughter"; ecophilosophy; nature; environment; human; nonhuman; animism

Introduction

Nathaniel Hawthorne's ecophilosophy has surprisingly received little attention by scholars and critics during the last few decades. This might be explained by several reasons such as the long-held belief that his works display an indifference and even aversion to the nonhuman natural environment. In fact,

he has most often been considered as an allegorist who shared New Englanders' deep suspicion and fear of nature. Melissa Pennell, for instance, has argued that Hawthorne's fiction somehow "reflects the attitude of Puritans (and the later American culture that endorsed westward expansion) towards nature. Nature must be brought under human control, ordered, cultivated, and tamed" (82). Pennell has further observed that Hawthorne's representations of the natural environment are highly ambiguous because nature is never completely positive or negative in his narratives. While it sometimes seems to bring solace to the characters and to be sympathetic to their conditions, it sometimes appears like a chaotic and hideous place which is full of danger and evil. Its dual aspects have undoubtedly obscured Hawthorne's attitude towards nature and made it even more complex. Moreover, Hawthorne's recurrent focus on the dark side of nature and the human psyche has led to the dismissal of his writings from the field of ecocriticism. Actually, Richard Brodhead has suggested that "Hawthorne is *not* a nature author but the diviner, behind appearances, of the hidden guilt Calvinism called 'Innate Depravity'" (26). In Brodhead's opinion, the writers who explore the human mind cannot be really interested in the nonhuman natural world. Even when they focus on anything outside the human realm, they often believe that it is of secondary rather than primary importance. Arguing along similar lines, Eric Wilson has also emphasised this idea by claiming that although "Hawthorne is an astute critic of the excesses of modern science, he remains much more interested in the human heart – primarily its Calvinistic struggles with sin – than in relationships between humans and nature" (xix).

Despite the numerous prejudices and misconceptions regarding Hawthorne's attitude towards nature, some ecocritical studies of his works have been recently undertaken. One of the most notable of these studies is Steven Petersheim's *Rethinking Nathaniel Hawthorne and Nature: Pastoral Experiments and Environmentalism* in which he explores the ecological concerns of Hawthorne's fiction and nonfiction by focusing on his representations of the natural environment and on the human relationship to it. Petersheim has argued that nature plays an important role in Hawthorne's stories and that it is an actual presence rather than a mere framing device or background material for the scenes of human actions. "Despite his frequent use of personification when representing the natural environment", he has suggested, "Hawthorne's fiction gives a significant role to the natural environment not only as background but as a system of vital processes that involve humans" (41). Indeed, nature is portrayed as a complex web of interdependent connections

and relationships through which Hawthorne implies that human beings are members of a larger sphere. In this web of relations, he argues, humans should respect and take heed of the natural processes of the environment rather than ignore and hinder them. All the actions and activities which are against nature's laws are described as having disastrous effects on both humanity and the environment. This justifies Petersheim's claim that nature and culture are so deeply interconnected in Hawthorne's pieces "that one cannot extricate one from the other without deforming it. As Georgiana's birthmark cannot be removed without doing violence to her, so culture cannot be extracted from nature without doing harm" (40). Petersheim has also noticed that Hawthorne had a feeling of affinity and kinship with the natural world which runs deep in his various writings and which underlines his close association with the Transcendentalists. During the period when he was living in Concord, in fact, Hawthorne was remarkably sensitive to the beauty and magnificence of nature which he continued to appreciate and celebrate.

Hawthorne's sensitivity to the grandness of the natural world has also been mentioned by other scholars and biographers who have examined his life and work. Darrel Abel, for example, has argued that Hawthorne shared many transcendentalist values and beliefs such as the view that nature is humanity's greatest teacher. He also shared the doctrine that nature is sacred and that it has a divine origin. Although "for Hawthorne nature was not practicably mediate with the divine", Abel has suggested, "it did bear ambiguous imprints of its divine origin" (42). Similarly, Hawthorne's biographer Randall Stewart has noted that he was greatly influenced by many transcendentalist writers and philosophers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and especially Henry David Thoreau who "opened up fascinating glimpses into the secrets of flora and fauna and thereby quickened Hawthorne's appreciation of nature" (66). In fact, Hawthorne spent a pleasant time living in close proximity to nature with these thinkers and was charmed by the sublime natural scenery around him. The scholars and critics who have explored Hawthorne's interest in and admiration of nature have undoubtedly raised many important points and issues such as the idea that humanity is an inseparable part of the environment and that it is not superior or more important than nonhuman natural elements. They have also acknowledged Hawthorne's stature as a nature writer and reappraised his significant contributions to American literary environmentalism. However, this scholarship has overlooked other key ideas and principles in Hawthorne's environmental thought. For instance, it has disregarded the fact that he considers nature as a living organism

whose entities are inspirited. It has also ignored his view that the nonhuman natural world has rights and interests which should be appreciated and respected. Furthermore, it has not paid sufficient attention to his warning against excessive interference with nature by humans. All these ideas are recurrently articulated in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” which largely highlights his abiding interest in the human relationship with nature.

The risks and hazards of manipulation of nature by humanity

Throughout “Rappaccini’s Daughter”, Hawthorne argues that nature is divinely arranged and that humans should not manipulate its systems and processes. He warns people against the hazardous effects of altering its elements in order to fulfil their own needs and desires. More specifically, he cautions them that the engineering of nature can lead to the toxicity of the environment which would seriously endanger their lives and existence on the planet Earth. In his portrayal of Rappaccini’s botanical garden of poisonous plants and flowers, for instance, he suggests that human beings cannot become immune to the diffusion of toxic substances into the environment. Although Beatrice seems to be invulnerable to these lethal materials due to her lifelong exposure to them, she is the “deadliest poison in existence. Poison was her element of life. With that rich perfume of her breath, she blasted the very air. Her love would have been poison! – her embrace death!” (123). She is evidently so dependent on poison that she cannot live without it. This is the most probable reason for her death when she drinks Baglioni’s powerful antidote against the most virulent poisons. Rappaccini himself does not become resistant to toxins despite his high scientific knowledge and skill. He never touches his plants or inhales their odours without wearing thick gloves and putting a mask over his mouth and nostrils. In his description of this scientist, Hawthorne claims that people who are infected with toxic chemicals cannot be restored to their normal lives and conditions. He maintains that many human beings might be contaminated with them without their knowledge. Like Giovanni who only later discovers that poison runs through his blood and veins, they could be totally unaware of their perilous situation until they start suffering from unusual and peculiar symptoms. While some of them catch serious diseases and die rapidly, others resist them and become walking poisons. As Everett

Franklin Bleiler has remarked, the toxicologist Rappaccini “has so worked on the physiology of his beautiful daughter that she is a walking poison” (233).

Beatrice's and Giovanni's transformations into walking poisons clearly underline Hawthorne's belief that man's manipulation of nature can lead to fates worse than death. In fact, both of them are doomed to live isolated lives devoid of durable social contacts and relationships. They are also destined to become hideous and loathsome creatures that people avoid for fear of being infected by their venomous breaths. Moreover, both of them have lost their humanity and turned into miserable beings. As Brent Waters has observed, Beatrice's “life will also be devoid of any intimate and lasting relationships, a crushing fate, as her father recognizes in his desperate attempt to transform Giovanni into a suitable, and equally poisonous, companion. Beatrice's invulnerability has made her something less than human” (153). In the same way, Giovanni has been converted into an abnormal and weird person who lives in an unnatural state. He is appalled when he discovers that he has been severed from all the warmth of life and enticed into an unusual condition which is described as the “region of unspeakable horror” (130). Poison has so drastically altered his blood and veins that he may no longer be able to have children. In his discussion of the story, Waters has raised this issue by claiming that, because of Beatrice's death, we never know how the life of a poisonous couple might unfold. He wonders whether they would be able to embrace fully or whether their lives would prove too toxic to interlock in any meaningful sense. He asks: “Would they be able to have offspring? If so, would their children share with them a life of poison, or would they be unable to touch what they have begotten until Rappaccini's skill worked its transformation once again?” (154). For these reasons, the engineering of nature can result either in the extinction of humankind or in the death of its humanity.

In Hawthorne's opinion, the manipulation of nature's systems and processes can have disastrous effects not only on humans but also on nonhumans. He articulates this idea mainly by emphasising the dangers that toxic chemicals also pose to the natural world. He claims that these materials are a serious threat to habitats and might lead to the loss of various animal species which would be unable to adapt themselves to living in a contaminated environment. As the reader of the tale can see, there are no bees, butterflies, birds, toads, frogs or any other untamed animals in Rappaccini's garden. All the organisms that entered it must have either perished or been severely harmed. Those living

around it might have abandoned their abodes in search of cleaner and safer environs. Moreover, Hawthorne argues that toxic chemicals can have highly negative impacts on plants and vegetation. For example, they can prevent them from growing in a normal way and affect their ability to survive. The plants that exist in the alchemist's laboratory are associated with supernatural aspects which emphasise their oddity and queerness. Hawthorne describes them through Giovanni's eyes in the following manner:

The aspect of one and all of them dissatisfied him; their gorgeousness seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural. There was hardly an individual shrub which a wanderer, straying by himself through a forest, would not have been startled to find growing wild, as if an unearthly face had glared at him out of the thicket. Several, also, would have shocked a delicate instinct by an appearance of artificialness, indicating that there had been such commixture, and, as it were, adultery of various vegetable species, that the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty. They were probably the result of experiment, which, in one or two cases, had succeeded in mingling plants individually lovely into a compound possessing the questionable and ominous character that distinguished the whole growth of the garden. (116)

Rappaccini's plants evidently do not resemble in any way those created by God. The contamination of the environment with poisonous chemicals has so deeply affected their growth and appearance that they look like frightful monsters and goblins to the eyes of the beholder. To Rappaccini, they appear as savage beasts, deadly snakes and evil spirits which are highly malignant and fatal. Their gruesome and horrible aspects largely highlight Hawthorne's representation of the scientist's garden as a gothic setting which is not very distinct from that in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* or in Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*. Actually, these plants create an atmosphere of alarm and fear which makes the place seem to be haunted and eerie. They also intensify the feelings of anxiety and insecurity in those who dare to enter it. Hawthorne endows them with strange and eccentric features through which they "transgress the boundaries of the plant world and appear to assume almost human characteristics" (Graham 25). Poison has transformed them into seemingly villainous characters that are persecuting and tormenting innocent ones. The gothic tone of the story is heightened by Hawthorne's

description of the magnificent shrub with purple gems which seems to be the most extraordinary plant in the whole garden. Nourished by water from the shattered marble fountain and subjected to numerous experiments, it has become so unnatural that its brilliance seems to illuminate the entire place even when there is no sunshine.

Hawthorne's use of the Gothic mode to warn his readers against the innumerable risks facing human and nonhuman life reflects his belief that man's engineering of nature can make the biosphere totally uninhabitable and bring about the end of the world as we know it. It also highlights his opinion that the alteration of natural systems might lead to a global environmental apocalypse and turn the planet Earth into a weird and evil place. In the tale, he expresses these beliefs by claiming that Rappaccini's poisonous substances can affect the entire universe. He states that this scientist has "produced new varieties of poison, more horribly deleterious than Nature, without the assistance of this learned person, would ever have plagued the world withal. That the Signor Doctor does less mischief than might be expected, with such dangerous substances, is undeniable" (106). Hawthorne does use apocalyptic rhetoric in his warning against these perils by imagining a place which is devoid of "natural" nature and which looks like a desert. Indeed, although Rappaccini's laboratory is full of various vegetable species, it is nothing but a wasteland due to its infertility and barrenness. Its poor soil cannot yield flowers, fruits, crops or even grass. Nothing else can grow and flourish in its deadly atmosphere. Its gloominess and desolation make it similar to the other regions of the city of Padua whose bleakness also underlines Hawthorne's apocalyptic discourse. In fact, the whole city is similarly described as a "barren" (104) and sterile place in which there are almost no trees, vegetation and verdure. There are no spots which can keep humanity in communion with nature and allow it to escape from the constraints of urban life and civilisation. By describing Padua as such, Hawthorne warns people against the total destruction and disappearance of the earth's remaining forests and wildlife. He argues that their hazardous practices can threaten whole ecosystems and cause irretrievable damage to the natural environment. In his apocalyptic vision, humanity would inevitably produce these suicidal results if it does not put an end to its excessive interference with nature.

To a large extent, Hawthorne might be considered as an environmental prophet who correctly predicted the harmful effects of humanity's tampering with nature. Due to the numerous ecological disasters that are taking place on earth, his worst fears and apprehensions are now realised. He would have

certainly been grieved and disappointed if he had witnessed the alarming rate of animal and plant extinctions which has been estimated at 74 species per day and 27,000 each year (Love 15). He would also have been highly surprised and shocked if he had seen the numerous poisonous gardens which now exist throughout the world. As a matter of fact, Rappaccini's garden has become a reality in our modern times. As Dave DeWitt has observed, "Hawthorne was way ahead of his time in his portrayal of Dr. Rappaccini's poisonous garden. There are now similar gardens around the world, including the Alnwick Poison Garden in Northumberland, England, the poison section of the Botanical Garden of Padua, [and] the Chelsea Physic Garden in London" (25). DeWitt mentions various other gardens which are similar to the scientist's laboratory such as the Toxic Plant Garden within the Montreal Botanical Garden, the Medicinal Garden at the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia and the W. C. Muenscher Poisonous Plants Garden at Cornell University. In addition to these, there are many other drug plant gardens such as the Maynard W. Quimby Medicinal Plant Garden at the University of Mississippi and the one at the University of South Florida (DeWitt 25). All these toxic gardens reveal the literal truth of Hawthorne's prophecies and the relevance of his warning against the thoughtless manipulation of natural systems by humans. They also emphasise his stature as a pioneer of American literary environmentalism and nature protection. Long before the emergence of these baneful places, Hawthorne had attempted to maintain the purity of the environment and advocated a return to a green and healthy world. His concern for the welfare of nature is further noticeable through many other ethics and principles that he introduces in the story.

Promoting a view of nature as a living organism

Hawthorne's representations of the nonhuman natural environment in "Rappaccini's Daughter" certainly demonstrate his rejection of the view that nature is a dead and inert machine which is insensitive to human action. They also indicate his strong disagreement with the notion that nature's laws can be understood by empirical enquiry and rational observation through which humanity is able to dominate and subdue the environment. These ideas were adopted by many Enlightenment thinkers and philosophers who believed that nature is nothing but a vast and complex machine whose laws function in a stable and orderly manner. René Descartes, for instance, claimed

that nature is spiritless and that humans can discover the way it works by analysing its various parts. In his opinion, natural processes can be translated into mathematical equations and formulas through which they might be explained and defined. Likewise, Isaac Newton portrayed nature as a gigantic clock which is objective, predictable and totally controllable by science. He argued that nature operates according to exact rules which it constantly obeys. This mechanistic view of nature was further fostered by the major figures of Baconian science which was predominant in the early nineteenth century and which was based on the idea that in "nature the laws are there, they are immanent in the natural world, and it is the will of God that in our enlightened progress we should discover them" (Peckham 189). In fact, Francis Bacon suggested that human beings should penetrate, coerce and beat nature in order to force it to give up all its secrets. He spoke of "putting nature on the rack and forcing her to reveal her secrets" and of science's capacity to "bind Nature to man's service and make her his slave" (qtd. in Griffiths 163). These philosophies were undoubtedly familiar to Hawthorne at the time when he wrote the tale. As Monika Elbert has claimed, Hawthorne was reading Bacon during the same year he was writing "The Birthmark". According to her, there is also evidence that he was reading this father of modern science as early as 1828 (66).

Hawthorne's disagreement with the mechanistic view of nature is evident through his criticism of Rappaccini's behaviour and attitude towards the nonhuman natural environment. In fact, Rappaccini is recurrently blamed for his belief that nature is a lifeless machine which is devoid of spirituality and consciousness. For him, nature is merely a senseless object that can never be hurt by the violence and cruelty inflicted on it. This is one of the main reasons why he does not feel self-reproach and guilt despite his ceaseless attacks against it. He is rather proud of his aggressiveness and of his untiring efforts to discover all the secrets of nature. His confidence and determination to uncover its mysteries are noticeable through the manner in which he investigates the various natural elements in his garden. "Nothing could exceed the intentness with which this scientific gardener examined every shrub which grew in his path", Hawthorne tells us, "it seemed as if he was looking into their inmost nature, making observations in regard to their creative essence, and discovering why one leaf grew in this shape, and another in that" (101). Like modern scientists, he believes that nature proceeds along fixed and precise laws that can be perfectly ascertained by rational observation. He also thinks that humanity can become the master of the universe by gaining

control over inanimate nature and making it serve its own needs and interests. This view of nature as dead matter is obviously considered immoral and highly dangerous to the environment. Hawthorne argues that it has not only established a dualism between humanity and nature but also encouraged the exploitation and destruction of the natural world. Moreover, it has resulted in the desacralisation and trivialisation of nature. People who adopt this belief tend to see it as worthless and insignificant rather than as divine and noble. They do not see any reason why it deserves to be appreciated and respected for its own sake.

In contrast to Enlightenment thinkers, Hawthorne promotes a view of nature as a living organism whose entities possess souls and spirits. He argues that all natural elements are capable of having a conscious sensory experience and that they are keenly sensitive to human disturbances. In his description of the numerous flies and reptiles that are killed by Beatrice and Giovanni's venomous breaths, for instance, he claims that animals can also undergo pain and suffering like human beings. He emphasises this idea by paying particular attention to the agonies and torments that these insects feel before their deaths. The lizard's violent contortions justify his claim that it is a sentient being and that it must have endured tremendous physical torture during its desperate struggle to maintain its existence. Similarly, the spider's great anguish and hardship highlight its capacity to feel pain. When Giovanni breathes upon it, the animal "suddenly ceased its toil; the web vibrated with a tremor originating in the body of the small artizan . . . The spider made a convulsive gripe with his limbs, and hung dead across the window" (128). As Hawthorne's statement denotes, this organism is neither insensitive nor invulnerable to human actions and activities. Giovanni has caused it enormous misery and heartache. Before the fatal assault, it was certainly pleased and contented while building its web in the corner of the roof. Like all other forms of life, it can experience happiness and delight when allowed to realise its good in its own way. Actually, Hawthorne implies that animals have energetic and purposeful lives. They are most of the time busy doing things that are intended to enhance their health and wellbeing. The several summer insects that have come to Rappaccini's garden, for example, are trying to preserve their welfare by searching for the food promised by the odours of its flowers. Thus, Hawthorne asserts that animals cannot be reduced to the status of irrational and dead machines.

Hawthorne's belief that nature is alive is further articulated in his representation of plants and various other nonhuman elements. By endowing the herbs and shrubs in the scientist's laboratory with human characteristics,

he suggests that they also have feelings and emotions which are no less powerful than those of their creator. Despite the violence against them, they are obviously still living as they seem to be alleviating each other's afflictions and distresses. As the tale's narrator states, the "strange plants were basking in the sunshine, and now and then nodding gently to one another, as if in acknowledgement of sympathy and kindred" (107). As is the case with the aforementioned animals, they are portrayed as conscious organisms whose actions are deliberate, meaningful and goal-oriented. Through their incessant movements, they seem to be protesting against Rappaccini's excessive zeal for science. Hawthorne's description of these movements indicates that plants can also be highly vibrant and dynamic. While some of them appear to be creeping like serpents along the ground, others climb higher and higher by using any means of ascent available to them. The shrub with purple gems seems to be the liveliest of them all. Clustering all over the fountain, it keeps glowing in the air and gleaming back out of the depths of the pool. Its restlessness never disappears. Likewise, the fountain and its water appear to be inspirited. Hawthorne attributes souls to them by claiming that the water "continued to gush and sparkle into the sunbeams as cheerfully as ever. A little gurgling sound ascended to the young man's window, and made him feel as if a fountain were an immortal spirit, that sung its song unceasingly, and without heeding the vicissitudes around it" (100). Each of these natural entities seems to have its own guardian spirit which enlivens and protects it. For this reason, Hawthorne argues that they are also entitled to moral respect and consideration.

In "Rappaccini's Daughter", the attitude of respect for the living world is obviously adopted by Beatrice who is highly sensitive to nature's wonders and charms. For her, every natural element has a soul and a spirit which make it as animate as a human being. Despite her infection with her father's poisonous plants, she considers them as her sisters and addresses them as if they were humans. "Give me thy breath, my sister" (108), she asks the shrub. She embraces it so passionately and intimately that "her features were hidden in its leafy bosom, and her glistening ringlets all intermingled with the flowers" (108). Hawthorne seems to blur the distinctions between Beatrice and the plant by emphasising their similarity and resemblance. Both the arrangement of her dress and the selection of its hues, he suggests, make her almost indistinguishable from the herb. Indeed, their analogy is so striking that it is difficult to determine whether "it were a girl tending her favorite flower, or one sister performing the duties of affection to another" (103). Beatrice's

belief that nature is inspirited is further noticeable through her relationship with animals whom she also treats with great deference and esteem. In fact, she never intentionally harms or injures a living organism. When she realises that her breath has caused the death of the lizard, she evidently becomes grieved and upset. The tale teller claims that she “observed this remarkable phenomenon, and crossed herself, sadly, but without surprise” (108-09). Likewise, she deeply regrets the demise of many other nonhuman beings in Rappaccini’s laboratory. Her childish delight in gazing at the beautiful insect that comes over the garden wall, for instance, is transformed into an intense feeling of sorrow and heartbreak as soon as she notices that it has ceased to exist. “Again”, the author states, “Beatrice crossed herself and sighed heavily, as she bent over the dead insect” (109). Hawthorne certainly praises her for her reverence towards animals and for her sacramental vision of nature. He also defends her against her lover by underlining her innocence and righteousness. He claims that “the real Beatrice was a heavenly angel” (129) and that she is not in any way responsible for his contamination with poison. Anyone who has such a worldview, he implies, is incapable of hurting people or inflicting the slightest damage on God’s nonhuman creatures.

By applauding Beatrice’s awe and reverence for life, Hawthorne probably calls for a return to animism as a way of countering environmental degradation and as a remedy for humanity’s increasing separation from nature. Throughout the story, he seems to encourage humans to talk not only to plants but also to animals and to all the other natural elements. He appears to be urging them to be humble in their relationship with nature and to behave in a manner similar to that of Saint Francis of Assisi. The latter is believed to have preached to birds, talked to wolves and tamed many wild animals. He called the sun, moon, stars, water and fire his brothers and sisters (McCarthy 230). For Hawthorne, the importance of animism consists mainly in promoting an attitude of respect and esteem for nature. Indeed, in the distant past, people did not dare to harm or mistreat natural elements because they believed that all of them had spirits. As Lynn White Jr. has argued, in “Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own genius loci, its guardian spirit . . . Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated” (10). According to him, the destruction of pagan animism has resulted in a great disharmony between humanity and nature. Humans no longer consider natural entities as living things which should be treated with prudence and care. They now abuse and “exploit nature in a mood of

indifference to the feelings of natural objects” (White 10). In his description of Rappaccini’s attitude towards the environment, Hawthorne suggests that the disappearance of animism has led to the belief that human beings are not only distinct from nature but also superior to it. They have grown to think that they are God’s chosen species and that they have unlimited power and authority over the natural world.

The denial of human superiority over nature

Hawthorne’s portrayal of nature as a living organism largely highlights his rejection of the anthropocentric belief that human beings are the centre of the universe around whom everything revolves. In contrast to this belief, he argues that humans are neither superior nor more important than the rest of creation. They are only a part of the nonhuman natural environment which sustains them and ensures their survival. Therefore, they have no right to dominate or subdue it. Hawthorne also argues that nature was not created exclusively for the purpose of satisfying human needs and interests. As he continually suggests in his various writings, the presence of human beings is not a required condition for the existence of nature and for the proper functioning of its ecosystems. It can certainly do well without them. In “Rappaccini’s Daughter”, this idea is articulated by the representation of humans as weak creatures who cannot compete with the strength and power of nature. In fact, Rappaccini’s presumed intellectual powers sharply contrast with his bodily feebleness and inferiority. Although he is a person of extraordinary knowledge, he appears merely as a “tall, emaciated, sallow, and sickly looking man, dressed in a scholar’s garb of black”. The tale’s narrator claims that he also has “gray hair, a thin gray beard, and a face singularly marked with intellect and cultivation, but which could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart” (101). Obviously, Rappaccini is so weak and powerless that he is totally dependent on the natural environment for his life. All his attempts to conquer and dominate it are futile and in vain. Hawthorne implies that nature would outlive him and his scientific experiments. He suggests that the natural elements in his garden would have been in a far better condition if he had not existed. They would undoubtedly have kept their freshness, purity and cleanliness.

Hawthorne’s disagreement with the notion of man’s superiority over the natural world is further evident through his depiction of humans as flawed

beings who cannot attain divine perfection. In contrast to the Biblical vision of humankind as created in the image of God, he maintains that humans have limited knowledge and imperfect reasoning abilities which make them unable to be elevated to God's status and to act as His personal representatives on earth. Moreover, they have a tendency towards evil rather than goodness due to the incessant harm they cause to the natural environment. For these reasons, Hawthorne frequently questions the view that human beings are God's chosen species. In the story, he also challenges the Judaic principle that "the world is unfinished, and human beings are empowered by God to complete God's work" (Troster 174). He argues that they cannot assume God's functions and be partners with Him in the work of creation. Actually, he often mocks and ridicules Rappaccini for his belief that he can play God's role in the creation of a new paradise. Throughout the tale, he represents him as a false deity whose garden is an anti-Eden. As Richard Fogle has suggested, "Rappaccini is the God of an unnatural Paradise, his garden is a perverted Eden. He is a false God, and is so proven at the conclusion, but his power in the interim is great" (99). Rappaccini's sin, according to Fogle, is "primarily in striving to rival God (so far as it is possible to man, since he cannot create but only alter God's creations), and secondarily in subordinating human values to scientific knowledge" (99). By creating an artificial heaven with a new Adam and Eve, Fogle claims, this scientist has become a daring rebel and blasphemer against God like Ethan Brand. His presumption and pride are so inconceivable that he becomes like a Lucifer. Towards the end of the story, he even parodies God when he bestows his blessing on his creation.

Hawthorne's representation of Rappaccini as a counterfeit God whose garden is a distorted Eden has been mentioned by many other critics in addition to Fogle. Viorica Patea, for instance, has similarly argued that this scientist usurped the role of the divine creator and rivalled Him with his alternative creations. Like Aylmer in "The Birthmark", he is a dangerous manipulator who cannot accept the created order and the limited nature of humankind. Both of them set out to make the world anew by removing the signs of human fallibility and making them achieve godlike perfection. Patea has further suggested that these scientists underline Hawthorne's sceptical attitude towards unnatural paradises in which the illusions of heaven coexist with the reality of hell:

Rappaccini and Aylmer are modern Gods of a contrived paradise. Yet Hawthorne expresses his distrust of man-made Edens. The earthly

paradisial garden remains the zone of the fall. In spite of its newness, Rappaccini's alternative garden is ravished and bears the indelible imprint of the fall as its own unavoidable pattern. The garden contains an earthly venomous shrub that grows on the immortal spirit of a shattered marble fountain, whose undecipherable design suggests its inevitable ties with its biblical model. To Hawthorne the heavenly promise of an earthly paradise invariably turns, as he suggests in *The House of the Seven Gables*, into 'the Eden of a thunder-smitten Adam, who had fled for refuge thither out of the same dreary and perilous wilderness, into which the original Adam was expelled.' (Patea 121)

The poisonous nature of Rappaccini's plants and Aylmer's draughts of immortality justifies Patea's claim that Hawthorne distrusts human-made Edens. The magnificent shrub with purple gems in the former scientist's garden is indeed partly described as the forbidden tree of knowledge whose fruit was eaten by Adam and Eve. Rappaccini seems to have created it as an act of obscene defiance of God's power and omnipotence. In his attempts to discover the secrets of the universe and to free Beatrice from her limitations, he eats the fruit of this tree which is represented in the story by the fruit of science. His inability to distinguish between the divine and the human, the holy and the profane, leads to his destruction and downfall. He kills his own daughter and condemns himself to a life of misery and despair. Likewise, Aylmer symbolically eats the fruit of the forbidden tree by using his scientific ability to correct nature's defects and disfigurements. He kills his wife Georgiana when he removes the small blemish from her cheek. According to Patea, the failure of these scientists to fulfill their perfectionist dreams underlines Hawthorne's rejection of the view which obliterates humans' finite, limited and corruptible condition. It also reveals his disbelief in all forms of utopia and extreme idealism. In fact, Hawthorne continuously insists on Adam's error-proneness and fallen state. In his opinion, he should be content with his lot rather than seek superhuman qualities and attributes.

Hawthorne's insistence on the limited and finite condition of humankind highlights his stature as an anti-speciesist who argues against the idea of human singularity and uniqueness. As he suggests, the distinction between human beings and other living organisms is unjustifiable and irrational. It is nothing but a prejudicial bias against God's nonhuman creatures merely because they are members of other species. For him, all species are interrelated and interdependent. There are no good reasons for putting humans in a separate

or superior moral category due to the fact that they have equal intrinsic value and inherent worth. Despite the prevalence of science and technology in their lives, they cannot be transformed into perfect beings. According to Waters, Hawthorne's story is applicable to the posthuman project and helps to expose it for what it really is. He summarises the central principle of this project as follows: "finitude and mortality represent the dire plight of the human condition. It is irrational and unfair that humans suffer, grow old, and die. In response, posthumanists offer the salvation of human transformation and perfection, culminating in virtual immortality" (154). In contrast to this view, Hawthorne obviously believes that human beings cannot solve the problem of death and live forever. As his description of Rappaccini's daughter indicates, they are destined to die even if they acquire immunity to the deadliest diseases. Similarly, they cannot stop the aging process and increase their lifespans. Rappaccini is incapable of changing this process despite his scientific expertise. Even if the posthuman project is realised and humankind is turned into a superior species, Waters claims, its future will be highly ambiguous and uncertain. He argues that "we do not know what will become of the human spirit and soul, and thereby whether or not these new beings will prove to be truly superior" (154). For this reason, he maintains that the posthuman project is a perilous enterprise whose optimism "disguises an underlying death wish for the human species" (150).

Conclusion

Hawthorne's focus on the human relationship with nature in "Rappaccini's Daughter" reflects his deep ecological consciousness and awareness. Despite the fact that the story was written in the mid nineteenth century, it is certainly still relevant to current environmental issues and concerns. The diffusion of toxic chemicals into the natural environment, for instance, is one of the biggest problems which now plague the earth. Its hazardous effects have been emphasised by many modern environmental thinkers and activists such as Rachel Carson. Like Hawthorne, she has argued that poisonous substances can result in the depletion of the earth's fauna and flora. These substances, according to her, have already caused the death of thousands of birds like robins and eagles whose populations have significantly declined. They have also caused sickness and death among various other animals such as horses, cows, goats, pigs, deer and bees. Furthermore, they have led to the suffering

and extinction of many plant species which have starved for the lack of necessary minerals such as iron, manganese and sulphur. The pertinence of Hawthorne's tale to the modern times also consists in its warning against the dangers of the anthropocentric outlook on nature. Many environmental ethicists, like Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess, have criticised this attitude and considered it as the basic cause of the ongoing natural disasters. They argued that it has not only created a dualism between humanity and nature but also legitimised the domination and destruction of the nonhuman natural world. It has also strengthened the belief that humanity can become the master of the universe by beating nature, forcing it to give up all its secrets, and making it their slave. Consequently, it has resulted in the disruption and disappearance of entire ecosystems.

The various environmental ethics and principles that Hawthorne introduces in the story can help counter or slow down the present-day ecological crisis. By respecting the divine origin of nature and not interfering with its systems and processes, for example, humans will promote the health and welfare of the natural world. They will maintain its balance, stability, integrity and beauty. Therefore, they will guarantee a better life not only for nonhuman beings but also for themselves. The view that nature is a living organism whose entities possess souls and spirits can also be highly useful in countering environmental degradation. If people adopt this attitude, they will no longer dare to hurt the feelings of natural objects. They will put an end to their ceaseless attempts to conquer and subdue the environment in order to satisfy their own needs and interests. Likewise, the notion that humans are not superior or more important than the rest of creation might be an effective solution to their increasing separation from nature. By admitting the truth of this belief, they will consider themselves as part rather than apart from the nonhuman natural environment. They will also stop looking for ways which might transform them into a unique and special species. All these values and ethics underline Hawthorne's stature as a pioneer of American literary environmentalism and one of the leading exponents of nature protection. They also justify the assertion that his writings have been unjustly dismissed from the field of ecocriticism. Although he was much interested in the human heart and its Calvinistic struggles with sin, he undoubtedly had a lifelong concern for the relationship between humanity and nature. This is evident not only in "Rappaccini's Daughter" but also in many of his other works such as "Young Goodman Brown", *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Marble Faun*.

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