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Unraveling the Complexities of Hawthorne's Plant Analogies

A cursory glance at Hawthorne's stories reveals a plethora of plant imagery—plant imagery which many critics address as part of a smaller issue which relates to the general picture of their overall thesis. However, in order to fully appreciate Hawthorne's allegories, we must not only recognize his plant analogies, but begin to understand the many complexities in his usage of them. Like the network of veins in a healthy plant, Hawthorne's different plant analogies help give his works the life and vitality which make them such classics, enabling them to be read over and over again since so many different hidden meanings abound.

So what do Hawthorne's plant analogies look like, over all? At the basic level, Hawthorne's plants represent human nature, which is present in the heart and made manifest through deeds. Hawthorne's works also address the spiritual side of human beings which can be either evil or good. Therefore, his plant analogies contrast the celestial with the earthly and the evil, poisonous side of nature with the pure, heavenly side of nature. Plants are specifically linked with the female, especially in regard to their purity or impurity and their upbringing, while flowers especially represent the feminine and feminine sexuality. Hawthorne also uses plant analogies in reference to general character and in order to describe what is happening to a person, either inside or outside—similar to the way he refers to the people in his own life. For example, in *The Scarlet Letter (SL)*, where plant imagery may seem less overt than in "Rappaccini's Daughter" (RD), he compares Chillingworth's visage after witnessing

Dimmesdale's confession to that of "an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun" (*SL* 199) and remarks in regard to Hester that after she has been made to wear the scarlet letter, "All the light and graceful *foliage* of her character had been *withered* up" (*SL* 133, my emphasis).

Of course, three of Hawthorne's allegories which rely heavily upon plant imagery are *The Scarlet Letter* (*SL*), "Rappaccini's Daughter" (RD) and "Young Goodman Brown" (YGB).

Understanding some of the complexities of plant imagery in these stories can serve as a spring board for understanding plant analogies in other Hawthorne stories. However, before one can delve into the meanings of these stories' plant analogies, one must first understand how plants functioned in Hawthorne's own life and what he knew about them. It is interesting to note that, though he does work on Brook farm, he only stays for a few months because he actually only likes the idea of a utopian society (Miller 187-99). Surprisingly, his reasons for living there are not simply because he enjoys working with plants or wants to "get back to nature." Rather, he goes there hoping he can write, but instead becomes frustrated, writing to Sophia after only two months: "'A man's soul may be buried and perish under a dung heap or in a furrow of the field, just as well under a pile of money'" (Wineapple 24). However, plants—and nature in general—must have played an important role in Hawthorne's life, since he writes of them often, both in his essays and in his journal. For example, he personifies nature and makes many references to plants in an article entitled "Buds and Bird Voices" (BBV 1-11) and compares his life with Sophie to living in their own Garden of Eden in their journal (Herbert 146-7). In "Buds and Bird Voices," he compares human nature to plants: "Human flower shrubs, if they will grow old on earth, should, besides their lovely blossoms, bear some kind of fruit that will satisfy earthly appetites, else neither man nor the decorum of nature will deem it fit that the moss should gather on them" (BBV 4). Hawthorne, who frequently alludes to the Bible throughout his works, seems

to be referencing a Biblical notion here as he compares fruit to the good works that people should produce throughout their lives. Therefore, I would concur with Max Autrey, who acknowledges that Hawthorne is stressing his “belief in the need for not only a fruitful life but one that sustains that productivity into old age” (215). Even though Hawthorne does not seem to actually work with plants extensively, his experiences at Brook Farm as well as the many articles he reads about plants and his own observations must have served as an inspiration for his works.

Hawthorne’s Forest Imagery

Within his works, Hawthorne’s plant analogies are concentrated in two main areas, the garden and the forest, and within those categories lay sub-categories of flowers, herbs, hybrids, and trees. Hawthorne’s forests appear in both *The Scarlet Letter* and “Young Goodman Brown.” One would generally assume, especially after a cursory reading of Hawthorne’s works, that they simply represent evil. Indeed, forests are most often dark and ominous, the places where witchcraft and meetings with the Devil occur. For example, in *The Scarlet Letter*, Pearl wants to hear a “story about the Black Man [the devil and] how he haunts this forest” since Mistress Hibbins has told her “that it [the scarlet letter] glows like a red flame when thou [Hester] meetest him at midnight, here in the dark wood” (*SL* 148). Young Goodman Brown’s experience in the woods is truly frightening: having taken “a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest” in order to meet the devil (YGB 1289), he observes that “The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds; the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians” (YGB 1294). Throughout the entire story, it is difficult if not impossible to find some positive element in the forest. Even after Brown returns from his journey, he is forever haunted

by the forest. It causes him to be suspicious of everyone he meets, and when he dies, “they carve no hopeful verse upon his tomb-stone; for his dying hour was gloom” (YGB 1298).

However, while it is true that most often the forest is represented as evil, there are times when it is portrayed in a positive light. The forest scene in *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, is described in positive terms on one side of the brook and negative terms on the other side. Ironically, Hester and Dimmesdale, having met once again where they first sinned together, talk on the side of the brook in the “intense seclusion of the forest . . . on the mossy trunk of a fallen tree [where] the boughs were tossing heavily over their heads” while the very personification and product of their sin (Pearl) plays on the other side of the brook with friendly flowers which “whispered, as she passed, ‘Adorn thyself with me, thou beautiful child’” (*SL* 150, 155, 162). In studying the above passage, Adams is right to observe that “The stream in ‘The Scarlet Letter’ represents the division between two worlds—that of Pearl and that of Hester and Dimmesdale.” He goes on to explain, as I have already mentioned, that “The general features of this ‘wasteland’ side of the brook are decay, gloom, and guilt. The opposite side of the stream is a region of growth, light, and innocence” (Adams 245). However, Hawthorne’s imagery is far more complex than this conclusion.

Of course, Hawthorne does not seem to be changing his view on forests; so far every human who has experienced the forest has encountered some form of spiritual death or evil nature. For instance, upon observing Chillingworth, Hester speculates

Would not the earth, quickened to an evil purpose by the sympathy of his eye, greet him with poisonous shrubs, of species hitherto unknown, that would start up under his fingers? Or might it suffice him, that every wholesome growth should be converted into something deleterious and malignant at his touch? (*SL* 141)

Here, Hester imagines that the earth can actually react to Chillingworth's touch, producing wickedness as a response to the evil that it recognizes in "the sympathy of his eye," or even "converting" itself into something wicked. From this passage and other similar ones, one might assume that the visage of the forest simply reflects the evil nature present in all of us. This dynamic clearly occurs in "Young Goodman Brown," where Paul J. Hurley describes Young Goodman Brown's journey as a journey into the "Heart of Darkness" and the forest as a symbol of "Brown's retreat into himself" (413). Indeed, Young Goodman Brown and Chillingworth both seem to journey into the forest with the intent of discovering more about evil—Brown being curious and Chillingworth looking for herbs to "cure" Dimmesdale whom he really wants to poison, while Hester and Dimmesdale commit their sin in the forest. What makes Pearl's experience in the forest so different from everyone else's, then, could be the fact that she is no mere human child. At the first scaffold scene, Hester is described as looking like the Madonna, "the image of Divine Maternity . . . something which should remind [us] of that sacred image of sinless motherhood whose infant was to redeem the world" (*SL* 60). Since Hester is being described as the Madonna, Pearl clearly is associated with the Christ child, as she continues to be throughout the story. Therefore, if the forest highlights the inherent evil of mankind, then the forest for Pearl highlights her inherent good as she is the symbol of the Christ-child and a symbol of hope and redemption for Dimmesdale and Hester. The forest becomes the mirror of the soul—a symbol of mankind's deepest, darkest nature that is revealed when one ventures into it, or the symbol of "growth, light, and innocence" (Adams 245) when an unearthly, heavenly creature such as Pearl ventures into it. However, there is another aspect of Pearl's experience which needs to be considered. Unlike Hester and Dimmesdale, she seems to thoroughly enjoy her time there, since

The great black forest—stern as it showed itself to those who brought the guilt and troubles of the world into its bosom—became the playmate of the lonely infant.

. . . Sombre as it was, it put on the kindest of its moods to welcome her. (*SL* 161)

Here, Hawthorne seems to be suggesting that the forest also becomes a reflection of whatever is in the heart of the person who enters it. Pearl, unlike Hester and Dimmesdale, did not bring “the guilt and troubles of the world” into the forest. So it would seem that Pearl’s experience in the forest reflects her attitude as well as her presence. In contrast, Hester and Dimmesdale enter the forest each with the stigma of the scarlet letter and all it represents embellished on their person. As they talk about leaving and starting a new life away from the stigma of the scarlet letter, hope rises within each of them.

Hawthorne remarks upon how their changing attitudes are reflected on each countenance. For example, once Dimmesdale decides to leave with Hester, “a glow of strange enjoyment threw its flickering brightness over the trouble of his breast. It was the exhilarating effect – upon a prisoner just escaped from the dungeon of his own heart” and he begins to “feel joy again” (*SL* 160). Hester’s attitude changes completely with the removal of the scarlet letter, for once it is gone, her “burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit” and “Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back” (*SL* 160). Finally, the forest, a mirror for the transformation in spirit of the two individuals, responds by reflecting their new attitudes:

And, as if the gloom of the earth and sky had been but the effluence of these two mortal hearts, it vanished with their sorrow. All at once . . . forth burst the sunshine, pouring a very flood into the obscure forest, gladdening each green leaf, transmuting the yellow fallen ones to gold, and gleaming adown the gray trunks of the solemn trees. (My emphasis, SL 160-1)

No longer is this side of the brook a gloomy, sad place to be; rather, it now represents life, vitality, and happiness. While it is easy to assume, at first, that the forest simply represents evil, or even just the evil inherent in human beings, one can see from studying the previous passage that the issue is far more complex. From a more in-depth study of Hawthorne's works, we see that his forest scenes actually represent human character—that which is in our hearts already—and what our intentions are. In regard to Hawthorne's forests, then, it would seem that the old adage really does ring true: what you seek for, you will find.

There are at least two types of recurring plants within Hawthorne's forests: trees and herbs or weeds. One recurring plant in both *The Scarlet Letter* and "Young Goodman Brown" is the tree. Frequently pictured, as in aforementioned quotations, as being "aged, black, and solemn" (*SL* 86) as well as dark and "gloomy" (YGB1289), the trees serve to hide and create suspicion and the illusion of evil lurking. Indeed, Goodman Brown notes "that the traveler knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead" (YGB 1289). In addition, Hawthorne uses the tree imagery to express the haughtiness of the Puritans, whose Calvinist notions he seems to be criticizing.

Calvinists, such as the Puritans were, believed in predestination, the idea that mankind cannot do anything to earn salvation. Instead, our fate rests in the hands of a God who chooses who will be saved and who will be forever damned to live in hell. In a review of "Young Goodman Brown," Thomas E. Connelly stresses that "This story is Hawthorne's criticism of the teachings of Puritanic Calvinism" since it is through Goodman Brown's experience in the woods that he learns the full implications of "faith" within the Calvinist doctrine (5, 6). However, I would argue that Hawthorne uses trees to signify this criticism in both "Young Goodman Brown" and *The Scarlet Letter*. For example, when Pearl plays outside, "the pine-trees . . .

needed little transformation to figure as Puritan elders; the ugliest weeds of the garden were their children, whom Pearl smote down and uprooted” (86). According to Grace Wellborn, the pine trees, as well as oaks, were among those trees long recognized as symbols of noble spiritual quality (163-65). In “Young Goodman Brown,” Hawthorne includes “four blazing pine trees” in his description of the devil’s church (YGB 1295). Perhaps Pearl, as that symbolic Christ-child, could recognize the hypocrisy of the Puritan leaders. They tried to appear noble and righteous, but they really had no more chance of getting into heaven than anyone else, especially by their own doctrine which stated that all are inherently evil and no one has any more chance of entering heaven than anyone else.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, there is another reference to trees which supports the idea that Hawthorne is criticizing Puritan Calvinist doctrine, or at the very least, subtly encouraging the reader to look at it in another way. This reference occurs in the beginning of the story when Hawthorne mentions a couple of reasons for why the rose bush near the prison was “kept alive in history.” The first was that it could have “merely survived out of the stern wilderness, so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally over shadowed it” (*SL* 54). Here, Wellborn argues, Hawthorne seems to “suggest the ‘felling’ in this community in the wilderness of the lofty qualities for which these symbols stood,” as evidenced by Pearl’s “uprooting” of the weeds that represent the Puritan children (63). If that is true, then by Hawthorne’s inclusion of a symbol which has outlasted the Puritan qualities, he seems to be inviting his readers to consider that some other belief system exists which cannot be destroyed because it is truth rather than hypocrisy. This conclusion is further confirmed when the narrator also suggests that the rose bush “had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson”—a woman known for believing, contrary to the Puritans, that one *can* be saved through faith alone (*SL* 54).

Another group of plants, besides the trees, which frequently appear in Hawthorne's forests, are weeds. Hawthorne almost always presents them as possessing negative qualities, using them to represent the evil present in the human heart, the Puritans' children (lofty spiritual qualities which were actually negative and needed tearing down), and witchcraft and the devil. For example, in "Young Goodman Brown," the weeds or herbs mentioned—"smallage and cinque-foil and wolf's bane"—are "plants associated with witchcraft" (YGB 1292). These plants were supposedly used to make an "ointment" which, according to Lord Bacon, the witches used to "acquire the faculty of flying through the air." Nevertheless, Cherry adds, it is possible that this ointment merely made people believe they had been with the devil as a result of a trance it put them in (43). At first, it is easy to wonder whether Goodman Brown has actually experienced his trip in the forest or perhaps has only dreamed of it. However, the knowledge that those plants associated with witchcraft quite possibly only put the user into a trance makes it seem more plausible that Brown, too, has entered some sort of trance in order to meet the devil. This idea is further supported by the way his experience ends: "Hardly had he spoken, when he found himself amid calm night and solitude . . . He staggered against a rock and felt it chill and damp, while a hanging twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew" (YGB 1297). The narrator postulates, "Had goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?" There seems to be no evidence whether Brown has tampered with the witchcraft-related herbs; however, the story exists in his mind and is a figment of his imagination—meaning that nothing exists in the story which is not present in his thoughts already. Therefore, if the forest is a symbol of the evil present in Brown's heart, Hawthorne seems to be using the weeds as another picture of the evil in man's heart.

These ideas seem to be further developed in *The Scarlet Letter*, especially in reference to Chillingworth and Dimmesdale. For instance, when Dimmesdale asks Chillingworth where he has found his herbs, the doctor replies, “Even in the graveyard, here at hand. . . I found them growing on a grave. . . They grew out of his (dead man’s) heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him.” He goes on to state “that these black weeds have sprung up out of a buried heart, to make manifest an unspoken crime” (*SL* 111). Here, the doctor seems to be not-so-subtly referencing Dimmesdale’s own sin which he has yet to confess. Dimmesdale’s sin, the longer he keeps it hidden, seems to keep eating away at his heart as he appears sicker and sicker as time goes by. The weeds’ location in the cemetery lends them to a comparison with death, an indication that weeds of sin left in the heart can lead to spiritual death. Dimmesdale’s failing physical heart seems to be but an outward indication of the spiritual death which is occurring as a result of his un-confessed sin. Once he rids himself of these weeds through his confession on the scaffold, Pearl, that symbol of the Christ child, forgives him. As a result, though his body still dies, his spirit does not, as the narrator indicates: “there was a sweet and gentle smile over his face, as of a spirit sinking into deep repose . . . now that the burden [those weeds of unconfession] was removed” (197).

In Chillingworth’s case, Hawthorne seems to be using herbs and weeds analogies to symbolize the doctor’s character transformation and association with the devil. As the narrator notes, “At first, his expression had been calm, meditative, scholarlike. Now, there was something ugly and evil in his face” (*SL* 108). Once Chillingworth chooses to associate with the devil, the character change he undergoes is reflected on his face, causing the townspeople to believe “that Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. . . was haunted either by Satan himself, or Satan’s emissary, in the guise of old Roger Chillingworth” (*SL* 109). Indeed, by the time seven years has passed, the

transformation is complete: “old Roger Chillingworth was a striking evidence of man’s faculty of transforming himself in to a devil” (*SL* 137). We already know that Chillingworth had been captured by Indians and learned medicine from them in the forest (*SL* 71), which, as mentioned before, is associated with evil and witchcraft; therefore, it is no coincidence that he is so knowledgeable when it comes to herbs. As she watches him gather herbs from the ground, Hester speculates

Would he [Chillingworth] not suddenly sink into the earth, leaving a barren and blasted spot, where. . . would be seen deadly nightshade, dogwood, henbane, and whatever else of vegetable wickedness the climate could produce, all flourishing with hideous luxuriance? (*SL* 141)

The plants mentioned in this passage are particularly chosen to represent Chillingworth since they are all magical and/ or were used by witches or Indians. Nightshade, for instance, was considered magical and was used to make people see ghosts, while dogwood was “used by all Indian tribes of eastern United States and was thought to have magical powers” (Wellborn 166-7). Henbane, which was known to throw “the victim into convulsions,” be “used by witches in ‘their midnight stews’” and was worn on heads of dead people in Hades” (Wellborn 166), could also be used in the witches’ “ointment” which supposedly made them fly (Cherry 343). It is no wonder that Hawthorne chose these plants to be associated with Chillingworth, the man whose evil intentions are clear right from the start. Indeed, Hawthorne seems to be using this plant imagery to show just how like the devil Chillingworth has become—he has spent his whole life not just associating with evil plants and learning about them, but now that his transformation is complete, even the earth wishes to respond by producing evil for him in order to reflect how corrupt his heart has become.

Hawthorne's Garden Analogies

Hawthorne's gardens are another place where numerous plant analogies may be found. Although "Rappaccini's Daughter" takes place in a literal garden largely made up of flowering plants, most of which are hybrids, there are scenes in *The Scarlet Letter* which contain many of the same elements. For instance, the main flower in *The Scarlet Letter* is the red rose, which appears several times throughout the novel, though only once in a literal garden. Pearl, too, a living hybrid who is analogous to the plants just as Beatrice is, is found in this same garden yet throughout the entire novel as well, since she functions as one of the main characters. Therefore, it is helpful to study *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of what "Rappaccini's Daughter" can teach us since its symbolism tends to be much more overt.

Throughout "Rappaccini's Daughter," many references to the garden being analogous to the Garden of Eden exist. For example, as Giovanni looks down upon Rappaccini's garden and watches Rappaccini tend the plants, he questions, "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?" (RD 1335) According to the Bible, which Hawthorne seems to be referencing, "In the middle of the [original] garden [of Eden] were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:9). Don Norford notes that, "In 'Rappaccini's Garden,' the fountain is analogous to the tree of life, and the purple shrub to the tree of knowledge. And Beatrice is Eve, who tempts Giovanni-Adam to eat—or rather breathe the air—of the exotic tree of allegory" (177). The Bible also mentions that "A river watering the garden flowed from Eden" (Genesis 2:10). In *The Scarlet Letter*, there is a scene in which a brook

separates two different “worlds”—that of the perfect Eden (Pearl’s side), where sin and evil do not exist and that of the fallen Eden (Hester and Dimmesdale’s side), which is full of death and gloom. Certainly, that brook is analogous to the river flowing in the Garden of Eden. We have already looked at this scene in terms of its forest imagery; however, looking at “Rappaccini’s Daughter” in terms of its Garden of Eden analogy will enable us to recognize Hawthorne’s garden settings in *The Scarlet Letter*.

However, in order to fully understand the implications of Hawthorne’s use of the Garden of Eden analogy, we need to first understand what Hawthorne’s definition of the Garden of Eden is. Not only did he reference the Biblical Garden of Eden, but he also uses it to create his own definition for a Garden of Eden here, in the present world. According to him, the Garden of Eden is not necessarily a literal garden. In his article, “Buds and Bird Voices,” in which he compares humans to flower shrubs, he asserts that “Each human soul is the first created inhabitant of its own Eden” (BBV 5). Indeed, Hawthorne’s own “Eden” was a symbol of absolute oneness with Sophie and no outside interference with their union (Herbert 146). He even calls Sophie his “sinless Eve” (Terrence 28) while she calls him “my Adam” (Herbert 147). Not only, then, do his “garden settings constitute a separate reality of their own” (242), as Adams observes, but they also teach us that as human beings, we create our own “realities”—our own worlds—and choose how we will operate within them.

Two main types of plants in Hawthorne’s garden analogies are flowers and hybrids. Hawthorne employs flowers in his stories as analogies mainly in regards to sexuality and spirituality, which are predominant themes in both “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and *The Scarlet Letter*. In “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” these flower analogies are linked for the most part, to Beatrice. In his biography of Hawthorne, T. Walter Herbert remarks “Nathaniel employs in his

fiction the convention linking flowers with the vagina, especially when erotic womanhood appears dangerous, as in Beatrice Rappaccini” (Herbert 122). It is easy to miss this flower-to-sexuality imagery at first; however, references to Beatrice in relation to flowers as both spiritual and sexual icons are abundant throughout the story. For example, when Giovanni first sees Beatrice, he associates her with flowers; he notes that she has “a bloom so deep and vivid” and immediately sees her as a beautiful, sexual, sensual woman: “She looked redundant with life, health, and energy; all of which attributes were bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled loosely, in their luxuriance by her virgin zone” (RD 1335). According to the editorial notes, Beatrice is wearing the type of girdle which signifies she is a virgin. Thus, one of the first things Giovanni notices about her is in reference to her sexuality—the fact that she is this mysterious, virgin beauty who has been so sequestered as to never have known any man.

Giovanni surmises that “flower and maiden were different, yet the same” (RD 1335-6). Indeed, just as the flowers have appeared as a result of hybridization, so has Beatrice, who seems to lack a natural mother but has been brought up among the flowers since birth. She has become endowed with their odors. Just as the flowers are kept apart from interaction with the outside world, so has Beatrice’s sexuality been suppressed and kept hidden from the outside world, where “Many a young man . . . would give gold to be admitted among those flowers” (RD 1341). Even Giovanni, once he has obtained entrance to the garden, and they have become familiar with each other, does not dare to touch her in any way, for there “had been no seal of lips, no clasp of hands, nor any slightest caress, such as love claims and hallows” (RD 1345). Throughout the story, it is Giovanni who attempts to give Beatrice flowers—perhaps attempting to entice her sexually—but she cannot and will not give him any of hers.

Since poison is also an important theme in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and is mentioned numerous times in regards to flowers and Beatrice, we need to understand contemporary thought concerning it. According to Margaret Hallissy, little was known about poisons in Hawthorne’s time. Most associated poison with the sensual woman who could lead men into sexual sin. In this story, the flowers (which Hawthorne associates with the female sex organ) are poisonous (linking to sexual sin) and associated with Beatrice (Hallissy 231-2). Ironically, however, it is Beatrice who does not allow Giovanni to touch her, and though she has been raised in her father’s garden (of sexuality), she does not know anything about the plants except “their hues and perfumes” and she wishes she could “rid. . . [herself] of even that small knowledge” (RD 1343). Obviously, Beatrice is not interested in being poisonous, or being sexually promiscuous at all. Since some have associated “original sin with sexual knowledge” in the first Garden of Eden (Boewe 48), Hawthorne seems to be stressing the idea that Beatrice, who has little to no knowledge of sexuality, is pure and in fact not poisonous on the inside. This theory is further supported by the spiritual terms which are used to describe Beatrice and the flowers.

Clearly there is “an analogy between the beautiful girl and the gorgeous shrub” which is talked of in spiritual terms. The shrub itself is fed by the water from the broken down fountain, which seems to possess an “immortal spirit” (RD 1334). The purple flowers on the magnificent shrub are associated with Beatrice as well; her voice makes Giovanni “think of deep hues of purple or crimson”(RD 1335) and she “seemed to [be]. . . heightening, both by the arrangement of her dress and the selection of its hues” her resemblance to the shrub (RD 1338). It is interesting to note that the color purple or crimson is tied significantly with Christianity, and specifically with Jesus and the cross. Giovanni notices that the purple shrub, with its gem-like blossoms, “made a show so resplendent that is seemed enough to illuminate the garden” (RD

1334). This is perhaps analogous to the way that Jesus' spiritual light can light up any darkness, as can the light within His believers; and Beatrice seems to light up her world, the garden, in the same way. Beatrice's beauty, which comes from the heavenly glow created from her spirit which seems to belong to God, causes her to be completely irresistible to others. Giovanni, for instance, was "affrighted at the eager enjoyment—the appetite, as it were—with which he found himself inhaling the fragrance of the flowers" (RD 1349).

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Pearl is the main character associated symbolically with flowers, though Hester, Pearl's mother and a woman connected with the egregious sin of adultery, is by extension also associated with flowers. The first one mentioned in this story, which is to become a motif throughout, is the "wild rose." In contrast to "the unsightly vegetation" growing near the prison, there is "a wild rose-bush" "rooted almost at the threshold" (SL 54). In Hawthorne's time, the wild rose "symbolized perfection, completion, consummate achievement, wholeness, the ultimate in beauty" (Wellborn 162). Why, then, is it located near a prison? Hawthorne narrator gives us a clue when he continues on to say that "its delicate gems . . . might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in". Being also a symbol for paradise which Christians would place on tombs, perhaps the rose bush is reminding the "condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom" (SL 54) that while he may not have a chance at redemption in this life, there is always hope for redemption in the next.

The narrator offers two possible explanations for the wild rose-bushes' survival throughout the years but leaves the question open:

. . . whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness, so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally over-shadowed it,—or whether. . .it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson,

as she entered the prison-door, - we shall not take upon us to determine. (*SL* 54)

Ann Hutchinson was condemned and imprisoned for teaching salvation through faith rather than works, a belief which differed greatly from the Puritan society at the time. Therefore, Wellborn is surely right to conclude that the rose bush becomes a “symbol for the theme of the novel, which tells the story of man’s sin, punishment, and redemption” (163); however, that is not its only function.

Throughout the novel, the rose is continually mentioned as a metonymy for Pearl, who is referred to as “a lovely and immortal flower” (*SL* 82). The next time the rose is mentioned is in chapter seven when Hester and Pearl visit the governor and enter his garden in search of flowers, to find only roses among the rest of the non-flowering plants. In response, Pearl “began to cry for a red rose, and would not be pacified” (*SL* 94). The minister, who jokingly calls her “Red Rose,” asks Pearl, “Canst thou tell me, my child, who made thee?” to which the girl “finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door” (*SL* 96-97). Thus, this rose bush motif serves as a symbol both of Pearl and of redemption throughout the novel.

However, there are other flowers which serve a similar function in the story—flowers which not only stand as a symbol for Pearl and redemption, but also foreshadow the important role Pearl plays as the Christ-child at the third scaffold scene. These flowers are present in the second important scene involving Pearl: that of the forest where Dimmesdale and Hester meet and give reference to her as the Christ-child. Here, she gathers “violets, and anemones, and columbines” (*SL* 162) and decorates herself with them. Legend says the violet was present at the cross and wilted in sadness at Christ’s death, that the anemone became red because Jesus’ blood fell on them, that its three leaves symbolized the Trinity, and that the petals of the columbine

look like doves, symbolizing the Holy Spirit (Wellborn 166). These are perfect symbols for Pearl as the Christ child who provides redemption for Hester and for Dimmesdale later on.

The second type of plant imagery Hawthorne includes in his fiction is the hybrid. He includes both the plants themselves and characters who serve as hybrids in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and in *The Scarlet Letter*. In “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” Rappaccini’s garden clearly consists of mostly “adultery of various vegetable species” (RD 1342). Here, Hawthorne’s use of the sexually implicit word “adultery” to describe these plants is no coincidence: according to Charles Boewe, “The word ‘hybrid’ originally meant an insult or outrage, especially an outrage connected to sex” (44). Rappaccini has produced a garden containing many plants that are more deadly than their counterparts found in the wild. In Hawthorne’s time, hybrids were generally considered evil; therefore, the negative connotation here is no surprise. In fact, attitudes about hybrids did not change until after Hawthorne’s death. Blending two different plant species together was unnatural—it was the creature trying to manipulate God’s creation, the result being “the monstrous offspring of man’s depraved fancy” (RD 1342).

However, in these two stories by Hawthorne, it is not just the plants which are hybrids. Both Beatrice in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* are hybrids themselves. Both have grown up among nature with only one physical, human parent. The mysterious purple plant is not just Beatrice’s “sister,” but a representation of Beatrice herself in plant form. Therefore, Giovanni’s imagined “analogy between the beautiful girl and the gorgeous shrub” (RD 1338) is not as far from reality as he may think. Indeed, “By her father’s scientific experimentation, which substitutes for maternal nature, Beatrice became . . . a hybrid of human and plant” (Brown 94). Beatrice, like the purple shrub, is both physically poisonous and extraordinarily beautiful.

Is Beatrice, then, destined for death? Charles Boewe asserts “she cannot be left to live, because nature abhors such mixtures, and purges them from its system” (48). However, her death seems unnecessary since she is only physically poisonous. How is one to know whether Beatrice was always poisonous? She must have had a human mother, even if only early in her infancy. If it is her father who has turned her into a “hybrid of human and plant” (Brown 94), it would seem that her father could also assist in her redemption. In addition, if Giovanni could become poisonous through associating himself constantly with poisonous plants, perhaps Beatrice could be redeemed by breathing in the air of pure plants. Beatrice may be herself a hybrid, but she is not in cohorts with evil; she tells Giovanni:

No; though I have grown up among these flowers, I know no more of them than their hues and perfume; and sometimes, methinks I would fain rid myself of even that small knowledge. There are many flowers here, and those not the least brilliant, that shock and offend me, when they meet my eye. (RD 1343)

She seems to have a true affinity only with the purple shrub; however, she seems to indicate she would give up her relations with it if that meant freedom from her present poisonous state.

Although her physical being is so poisonous that regular flowers wilt in her hands, she unwittingly kills “a beautiful insect” with her breath, and her touch leaves a “purple print” upon Giovanni’s hand (RD 1335), Beatrice’s pure spiritual being shines forth in her face as it reveals an “expression of simplicity and sweetness” (RD 1338). When Giovanni becomes angry with her, she calls out to the Virgin Mary, not the devil (RD 1350). She earnestly tries to convince him that “though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God’s creature, and craves love as its daily food” (RD 1350). Giovanni himself is not thoroughly convinced of her evil nature; he devises a plan to assure himself once and for all “whether there were those dreadful peculiarities

in her physical nature, which could not be supposed to exist without some corresponding monstrosity of soul” (RD 1348). Giovanni mistakenly assumes Beatrice’s evil physical nature is an expression of her soul, rather than choosing to believe in the “affectionate and guileless creature” he has come to know. After his test, which proves her physical evilness, he assumes that she needs a physical antidote—the vial from Baglioni—so that he may lead her into his world (RD 1351). It is Giovanni who is really evil because he wants to cure her for selfish reasons and does not understand that

. . . after such deep love had been so bitterly wronged as was Beatrice’s by Giovanni’s blighting words. . . there could be no such hope. She must pass heavily, with that broken heart, across the borders – she much bathe her hurts in some fount of Paradise, and forget her grief in light of immortality – and *there* be well! (RD 1351).

Beatrice is not redeemed in this life because Giovanni fails to truly love her. She has ingested so much poison into her system that a physical antidote could only kill her, for “as poison had made life, so the powerful antidote was death” (RD 1352). Beatrice’s only hope of redemption is through a spiritual cure—that of true love. When her spiritual state is thus wounded, she can only be healed by passing from this world into Paradise. Thus, although Boewe is right, to a degree, in concluding that Beatrice “cannot be left to live,” it is not necessarily because “nature abhors such mixtures, and purges them from its system” (48) that she must die. Rather, it is because she lacks any other antidote for her condition.

Though it is relatively easy to see Beatrice as a hybrid, it is perhaps a little more difficult to recognize and understand Pearl as a hybrid. Unlike Beatrice, whose mother is never mentioned, Pearl has a mother as well as a father. However, though Pearl’s earthly father exists,

he never participates in her life. Raised only by her mother, Pearl is brought up among nature and often plays among trees, flowers, and weeds (*SL* 86, 161-2, 168). In “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” Hawthorne calls hybrids “adulterous species.” Therefore, Pearl is also a hybrid since she is the result of her mother’s adulterous relations with Dimmesdale. Pearl, however, is a different kind of hybrid than Beatrice. Until the final scaffold scene in which Dimmesdale declares his sin and dies, Pearl is seen, not as a human child, but as some sort of spiritual being possessing both evil and good qualities. For instance, the narrator comments that “She seemed rather an airy sprite,” while her own mother wonders at times “whether Pearl was a human child” (*SL* 83). On the one hand, people thought “the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden” (*SL* 82); on the other, they saw her not only as “an imp of evil, emblem and product of sin” (*SL* 84), but also as a “demon offspring” since her father did not seem to exist (*SL* 88). The question which presents itself here, especially after having studied “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and realizing that Beatrice passes from death into spiritual life to become redeemed, is how must Pearl be redeemed? What will make Pearl no longer a hybrid?

The governor thinks to redeem Pearl by taking her away from Hester and instructing her as a good Puritan child (*SL* 96). However, she can only be redeemed through fulfilling her role as the symbolic Christ child by forgiving Dimmesdale (as shown by her kiss) when he finally confesses his sin at the scaffold (which could symbolize the cross). The narrator states earlier that Pearl “wanted . . . a grief that should deeply touch her, and thus humanize and make her capable of sympathy” (*SL* 148). Later, at the final scaffold scene, upon her father’s death,

The great sense of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father’s cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever do battle with the world, but be

a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled. (*SL* 197)

With this scene, Pearl is transformed from spirit to flesh. She is now a human being since she has fulfilled what she was sent for and Dimmesdale has repented of his sin. Unlike the other human hybrid, Beatrice, Pearl does not have to die to become whole, and she passes from the symbolic, spiritual world after Dimmesdale's confession to that world of a "normal," human child able to feel joy and sorrow; whereas Beatrice passes from a physical world to a spiritual realm in order to achieve restoration.

Obviously, Hawthorne never wastes words when he constructs his works—each type of imagery he incorporates is always to enhance some idea which helps his readers understand the allegory as a whole. Therefore, whenever Hawthorne includes any references to plants within his works, not only is it important to realize that they were carefully selected to enhance his analogies, but also to realize that, when examined closely, they, too, form a piece of the larger framework when it comes to understanding his allegories. If we can begin to understand some of the many complexities in this type of imagery, we are well on our way to fully appreciating many of Hawthorne's works.

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