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# "From the Writings of Aubépine": Metafiction in Hawthorne and Hoffmann

Critics and scholars have frequently pointed to an influence of German Romanticism in the early tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864). Already from his first publication, *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), American critics have compared Hawthorne to Johann Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853), who played an important role in the early German Romantic movement, *Jenaer Frühromantik*, and became famous in America for his fairytales such as "Der blonde Eckbert" (1797), commonly considered to be the first literary expression of the *Romantik*. In 1843, in a review of the second edition of *Twice-Told Tales* from 1842, Hawthorne was in fact labeled "the Tieck of this American literature of ours" (Pochmann 138) and some years later, in a 1847 review of Hawthorne's second collection of tales, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), Edgar Allan Poe, whom American critics often compared to Tieck as well, named Hawthorne "the American Tieck" and indirectly accused him of plagiarism.[1] Hawthorne, though, was not explicit about his admiration of Tieck's works until very late in his career as a writer when he mentions Tieck in his last completed romance *The Marble Faun* (1860).[2] In the passage in question, Hawthorne draws attention to the practice of re-telling and amplifying tales of other authors (a theme also indicated in the title of Hawthorne's first collection, *Twice-Told Tales*). The following passage regards the story "Spectre of the Catacomb" within *The Marble Faun* about one of the characters of the romance:

> The story of this adventure spread abroad, … and was communicated to the German artists, who so richly supplied it with romantic ornaments and excrescences, after their fashion, that it became a fantasy worthy of Tieck or Hoffmann. For, nobody has any conscience about adding to the improbabilities of a marvellous tale. (32)

Already at the time when Hawthorne graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825, Johann Ludwig Tieck and E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) were

two of the most acclaimed writers of fantastic tales in the western world. Hawthorne's remarks in *The Marble Faun* indicate that he also knew of and admired Hoffmann and his fantastic narratives, positioning this writer on an equal level with the more renowned Tieck. In the history of Hawthorne criticism, the comparison of Hawthorne with Tieck is almost a cliché, while the other German Romantic mentioned briefly in *The Marble Faun* has received less attention as a possible source for Hawthorne's literary production. Was Hawthorne in fact directly influenced by Tieck or by Hoffmann? The question of literary influence is problematic and, in the case of Hawthorne, ultimately impossible to ascertain as the scholarship on Hawthorne's borrowings shows.

The tale "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844) might have puzzled readers of Hawthorne's early tales. This particular work stands out both among the pieces of his first collection *Twice-Told Tales* and among those of his second collection *Mosses from an Old Manse*, in which it was published. The striking difference is not simply the atypical and exotic setting in sixteenth-century northern Italy, a long way from both Puritan and modern New England (the typical settings of Hawthorne's tales and sketches), but also its ironically playful preface and its open and puzzling ending are both very unlike the typical Hawthornian cyclic, allegorical, and moralizing pathos finale. These distinctions in setting and style could easily be interpreted as indicating possible literary influences from elsewhere, and scholars have indeed sought intertextual references to other texts (fictional as well as non-fictional). Most have done so on the basis of plot similarities, rather than taking the particular narrative style of "Rappaccini's Daughter" into consideration.

For the analysis I have chosen to read "Rappaccini's Daughter" in parallel with two of Hoffmann's early and most famous short fictional texts, "The Golden Pot" ("Der goldene Topf," 1814) and "The Sandman" ("Der Sandmann," 1816), both of which share striking traits with "Rappaccini's Daughter" in terms of plots, themes, and narrative technique. In particular, I will examine the role in the works of both authors of what we today call metafiction.[3] With my choice of treating these tales of Hoffmann rather than part of Tieck's work, I hope to shed light on this less explored but, in my view, similarly apparent and noteworthy transatlantic Romantic link.

## SOURCES ON THE HAWTHORNE-HOFFMANN CONNECTION

The resemblances in the works of Hawthorne and Hoffmann were not considered until after Hawthorne's death, and then only sporadically and incidentally. In fact, I have come across merely four mentions of affinities between the two authors between 1903 and 1957. None of them are either systematic or thorough.

The earliest source I have come across is Alexander Jessup and Henry Siedel Canby's *The Book on the Short Story* from 1903. In the introduction to the anthology of short stories they argue that "Tieck is more like Hawthorne than is any American writer; Hoffmann's characters, especially Master Martin [from the tale "Master Martin, the Cooper, and his Journeyman," 1818], powerfully suggest the half-real, symbolistic figures of Hawthorne's creation" (10). Jessup and Canby go on to compare Hoffmann's "Serapiontic Principle" expounded 1819/1821[4] with the "impressionistic" method employed by Hawthorne in many of his tales (Ibid.). The two critics are hesitant to draw any hasty inferences regarding a direct literary influence, and they cautiously conclude: "The Germans of the Romantic School felt much as Hawthorne, and wrote somewhat like him, or he like them; that is about as far as it is safe to go" (11).

In the 1936 article "Hawthorne's Literary Borrowings," Arlin H. Turner merely mentions Hoffmann in a footnote as contributing "certain ideas for his [Hawthorne's] treatment of fate and for his symbolic characters which are only half real" (559). In the same footnote Turner subsequently points to "The Sandman" as a possible direct inspiration for Hawthorne's "Feathertop" (1852).

More than ten years later, in another footnote, Jane Lundblad suggests Hoffmann's direct influence on Hawthorne in her study *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the European Literary Tradition* (1947), linking "Rappaccini's Daughter" with Hoffmann's "The Datura Fastuosa: A Botanical Tale" ("Datura Fastuosa," 1821) (109).

Another ten years passed before Henry Pochmann in 1957 indicated a resemblance between the works of Hoffmann and Hawthorne. Pochmann devotes a full five pages of his study of the influence of German culture in America between 1600 and 1900 to Tieck's alleged impact on Hawthorne, while a mere half page is devoted to the surmise of Hoffmann's influence on the American writer. However, Pochmann assumes that Hawthorne

probably knew more of Hoffmann's works than Tieck's, since Hoffmann was more widely translated into English than his fellow countryman. In his short discussion of Hoffmann, Pochmann draws parallels between Hoffmann's "The Devil's Elixir" ("Die Elixiere des Teufels," 1815/16) and the Hawthorne tale "The Prophetic Pictures" (1836), between "My Cousin's Corner Window" ("Des Vetters Eckfenster," 1822) and the sketch "A Sunday at Home" (1836), and lastly between "A New Year's Eve Adventure" ("Die Abenteuer der Sylvesternacht," 1814) and "Monsieur du Miroir" (1836), while (paradoxically) underlining that similarities between the two authors can easily be overemphasized and that the influence of Hoffmann "must be put down as negligible" (387). As an overall declaration, echoing the previous sources on the topic of influence, Pochmann concludes that "the influence of German literature on Hawthorne is relatively inconsequential" and that "most of Hawthorne's tales which suggest outside influence are traceable less to Germanic sources than to his peculiar temperamental inheritance" (388).

An additional fifteen years later, Hubert I. Cohen publishes an entire article arguing that "The Sandman" has directly inspired certain aspects of "Rappaccini's Daughter." This short article was published in *A Journal of the American Renaissance* in 1972 and it constitutes the first bold and explicit postulation of a direct influence of Hoffmann on Hawthorne. In his article, Cohen theorizes that the idea for a new tale, which Hawthorne supposedly got from reading a passage of Sir Thomas Browne's *Vulgar Errors*[5] in 1837, lay dormant until he read Sir Walter Scott's significant essay on Hoffmann in 1841, when it was first published in America in an anthology of Scott's essays.[6] Attention is drawn by Cohen to the fact that instead of the setting and characters of Alexander the Great in the land of the Indian prince (as in Browne's anecdote), Hawthorne chose an Italian setting and characters for his tale, allegedly inspired by the Italian characters of "The Sandman." Cohen furthermore points to parallels regarding themes and characters in the two tales, "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "The Sandman."

A couple of years after Cohen's article, Patricia Pollock Brodsky, in an article on the influence of Hoffmann, Pushkin, and Hawthorne on the Russian writer Fyodor Kuzmich Sologub, repeats Jane Lundblad's suggestion from 1947 of a parallel between the tales "The Datura Fastuosa" and "Rappaccini's Daughter," thereby hypothesizing a possible influence by Hoffmann on Hawthorne (98).[7]

In the 1980s, Cohen's thesis about the direct influence of Hoffmann on Hawthorne was expanded and inspired as much as three critical works: a dissertation by Alienne R. Becker, followed by an article in *Comparative Literature Studies*, and an article on Hawthorne, Tieck, and Hoffmann by Alfred H. Marks published in *A Journal of the American Renaissance*.

Alienne R. Becker's dissertation, written in 1984, argues that the techniques used by Hoffmann to create fantastic fiction (through the use of Romantic irony, the grotesque, and ambiguity) were the same employed by Hawthorne to produce the fantastic in his fiction. Becker thus follows in the footprints of Cohen, concluding that Hawthorne was strongly influenced by Hoffmann.[8]

Becker's 1986 article focuses on "The Devil's Elixir" as a model for Hawthorne's "Alice Doane's Appeal" (1835). Becker founds her article on the common use by the two authors of the narrative techniques of fragmentation and multiple perspectives, following the German tradition of the arabesque as the rhetorical figure of what Friedrich Schlegel calls "artfully organized confusion" (3).[9]

The third work of the 1980s, and the last study on the subject until the present day, is a longer article by Alfred H. Marks of 1989 on both Tieck's and Hoffmann's influence on Hawthorne. Marks argues that the assimilation of different literary sources was characteristic of Hawthorne's writing process and defined by Hawthorne himself as the romantic mode of storytelling. As to the influence of Tieck and Hoffmann, Marks states that for Hawthorne "Some of the use was tutorial.… Some of the use was in imitation. Much of the use was in retelling: using plot outlines, characterizations, or bits of action" (5). Thematic parallels are drawn between "Rappaccini's Daughter" and Hoffmann's three tales "The Datura Fastuosa," "The Sandman,"[10] and "The Golden Pot," as well as between "The Minister's Black Veil" (1836) and Hoffmann's "The Vow" ("Das Gelübde," 1817). Marks also points to resemblances between "The Artist of the Beautiful" (1844) and Hoffmann's "The Golden Pot," "The Doubles" ("Die Doppeltgänger," 1821), and "Arthur's Hall" ("Der Artushof," 1816). Finally, the structural similarity of the romance *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and the tale "The Entail" (1817) is mentioned.

Since Marks' analysis, the question of Hoffmann's literary influence on Hawthorne has been left alone by critics and scholars altogether.

## Thematic and Narratological Affinities[11]

Roughly summarized, the three tales considered are about a young male student living in a town far away from home, who falls in love with a young and beautiful but rather strange girl. In all three cases, it is the beauty and mystery of the girl that causes the attraction, and in all three cases the protagonist is manipulated into falling in love as part of a larger scheme laid by the father/creator of the girl.[12]

One of the main themes in common is the coexistence of a real and a fantastic dimension, expressed as the conflict between what is real and what is imaginary from the point of view of the protagonist, as well as the characters' ability to grasp and relate to supernatural experiences as representing a sphere beyond the purely rational one. This is presented as an inner conflict between rational/enlightened explanation models as opposed to romantic/idealistic points of view and connected to the themes of (uncertain) physical perception and vision. The problem of the distinction between the real and the imaginary is also extended to the formal aspects of the tales through grammatical ambiguity (conveyed through the use of modalizing expressions[13]) as well as indeterminable and multiple perspectives of narration. Hawthorne's narrator cunningly organizes his tale through changing perspectives and limited perceptions thus causing the ambiguity that brings about the horror effect of this tale. Likewise, both of Hoffmann's narrators employ indeterminable and multiple perspectives to convey ambiguity of perception.

Another shared point between the three tales is the questionable reliability of both the characters and the narrators. One aspect of the protagonists' unreliability is their limited visual faculties. As mentioned before, limited perception and vision are two interrelated aspects of the grammatical ambiguity in the tales. The ambiguity in this case is caused by the limited physical perception and possibly wild imagination of the protagonist, whose impressions are unverified by any other voice. In both "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "The Sandman" for instance, the protagonists are voyeurs looking at the female object of interest from afar through a window frame, and they both have trouble distinguishing clearly what they are watching. When from his window he witnesses the unnatural phenomena of Beatrice's venomousness in Rappaccini's garden, Giovanni simply chooses not to believe his eyesight,

consequently proving himself an unreliable focalizer.[14] Similarly, Nathanael's vision of Olimpia in "The Sandman" is portrayed as unreliable. At first he is unable to distinguish her features when looking at her behind her window through his own window. But when applying a perspective glass sold to him by the suspicious figure Coppola he suddenly discovers her charming face and eyes shining like "moist moonbeams" (106) and becomes completely obsessed with this strange and stiff girl. Unlike him, all the other characters in the story seem to recognize the lifelessness in the character of Olimpia, and Nathanael is in consequence presented as an unreliable focalizer, just as Giovanni in Hawthorne's tale.

In short, the narrated points of view along with the physical perception of the protagonists are fundamental to bewilder the readers' capacity to distinguish between real and imaginary, and it is this indeterminacy that ultimately creates the *uncanny* effect in "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "The Sandman." Hence, it is fitting to regard the notion of the uncanny as an effect not only relating to the protagonist, as in Freud's original conception of the uncanny, but experienced by the reader as well. To this end I am employing the concept of the "poetical uncanny" developed by Marc Falkenberg in 2005, which combines Ernst Jentsch's and Sigmund Freud's theories of the uncanny, and considers the text in its entire structure, including its aesthetic effect on the reader, thereby breaking with the tradition of an exclusively psychoanalytic reading of "The Sandman." Falkenberg maintains that it is the indeterminacy on both the diegetic and the extradiegetic levels, as well as between the two, that causes the poetical uncanny. He uses "The Sandman" as a paradigmatic text for this effect, arguing that the tale expresses a "pervasive paradoxical ambiguity," (35) not only regarding the supernatural events, but as a dominant aesthetic feature defining the text as a whole. The distinction between fantasy and reality is not simply an issue for the protagonist, but the reader him/herself is disoriented by the text's ambiguousness. Readers experience the uncanny *both* because of their identification with the protagonist and his uncanny experiences *and* because of Nathanael's unreliability (due to his incapacity to "read" the events). Consequently, the protagonist contributes to the reader's unstable position through his paranoid uncertainty regarding the interpretation of his observations, thus presenting himself as a possibly insane focalizer of the action, just as Giovanni in "Rappaccini's Daughter," as pointed out before.

However, I would argue this "pervasive paradoxical ambiguity" to be two-sided, including the role of the narrator as well. So, on one hand we have the unresolved paradox of the mysterious events, which are either the product of Nathanael's paranoid mind in a realistic setting or in fact genuine events within a fantastic setting where the laws of nature as we know them are suspended. This is as far as Falkenberg goes in his analysis. On the other hand, though, there is the paradox of the narration itself, expressed both through the prefatory poetological remarks about the limitations of representation and through the narrator's precarious and unreliable position in the tale itself. This is essentially a paradox involving the capacity of fiction to represent reality. The text therefore paradoxically points to its own limitation as portrayer of truth and supplier of meaning. Thus, the text does not simply illustrate the crisis of perception through its plot and themes, but it turns that crisis into an inherent part of its own structure, generating a certain reading experience and consequently causing twofold uncanniness for the reader, due to the instable positions of both protagonist and narrator.

The idea of this two-sided pervasive paradoxical ambiguity is also applicable to Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter." Just like "The Sandman," Hawthorne's tale points to the precariousness of perception both through content as well as through the structure of the text. Not only does Hawthorne in his preface emphasize the possibility that the text may not be able to represent reality but rather appear as "nonsense" (72), but furthermore, the narrator of the tale presents the events from an unreliable point of view, thus causing a disorienting and uncanny reading experience. By veiling Giovanni's observations of the mysterious events with modalizing expressions, emphasizing his physically limited perspective and casting doubt on the integrity of his character by portraying him as dreamy, shallow, and egocentric, the narrator subjects the reader to uncertainty and disorientation regarding the true nature of Beatrice, her father, the garden, as well as of Giovanni himself. The uncanniness is caused by Giovanni's horrifying and ambiguous observations as well as by the suspicious characters Dr. Rappaccini and Professor Baglioni. The true disposition and ambition of the latter is hinted at by the narrator early on in the story, but not revealed until the end, and then still only implicitly and without any comment by the narrator. By focusing on Giovanni and his shortcomings as well as on Dr. Rappaccini

and his monomania, the narrator intentionally diverts the reader's attention from Professor Baglioni and his dubious intentions. With the final surprise disclosure, the reader is made aware both of the narrator's unreliability and inadequate capacity to coherently portray the events and of the limitations of the literary text to represent reality. The uncanny is thus also employed on an extradiegetic level, the narrative strategy of the text.[15] It is therefore on a level of content as well as on a formal and ontological level, dealing with the basic nature of narrative itself and with the possibility, or not, of truthfully telling a story, that Hawthorne and Hoffmann's modes of expression in the tales in question share yet another common feature.

## Ironic Metafiction and the Limitation of Narration

"From the Writings of Aubépine"[16] is the subtitle of "Rappaccini's Daughter" – "aubépine" meaning "hawthorn" in French.[17] Hawthorne commences his tale by an ironic and witty preface, termed a "mock-introduction" by F. O. Matthiessen (221), in which the fictitious French writer, M. de l'Aubépine, and some of his works are presented. Evidently, Hawthorne is in fact talking about himself through the distance of irony in addition to the distancing device of translation.

Through the introduction of M. de l'Aubépine, Hawthorne is in essence doing three things: he is criticizing the literary trends of the time, he is complaining about not being recognized by the audience due to his failure to comply with these literary trends, and he is furthermore giving indications of how better to appreciate the fiction of this fictitious author, i.e. Hawthorne himself. All this is masked by what Davide Del Bello names "ironic self-referentiality" (130).

The first part of the preface is a satirical critique of the main American literary trends of Hawthorne's day, as well as of the readers and critics who failed to acknowledge his literary skills, which he positions in between the two main literary trends of the time. The harshest satire is bestowed on the transcendentalist elite, but also the "mass-literature" is disapproved of, and its authors are characterized as "pen-and-ink men" who serve the "intellect and sympathies of the multitude" for which this imaginary French writer is "too refined" (71).

The short preface continues by stating that Aubépine's productions

> are not altogether destitute of fancy and originality; they might have won him greater reputation but for an inveterate love for allegory, which is apt to invest his plots and characters with the aspect of scenery and people in the clouds and to steal away the human warmth out of his conceptions.… Occasionally a breath of Nature, a raindrop of pathos and tenderness, or a gleam of humor will find its way into the midst of his fantastic imagery, and make us feel as if, after all, we were yet within the limits of our native earth. We will only add to this very cursory notice that M. de l'Aubépine's productions, if the reader chance to take them in precisely the proper point of view, may amuse a leisure hour as well as those of a brighter man; if otherwise, they can hardly fail to look excessively like nonsense. (71, 72)

These first metafictional remarks could very well have been taken directly from some critical review of Hawthorne's fiction and are here used ironically both to continue Hawthorne's subtle criticism of his reviewers and (lacking) audience, and at the same time to initiate the ensuing didactic part of the preface. The use of allegory is differentiated from "fancy and originality." This self-critique regarding the use of allegory and fantastic imagery is of course highly ironic as Hawthorne's use of allegory as a narrative strategy is quite deliberate. In the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, he in fact defends his choice of using the romance genre as opposed to the novel, since it allows him to present the "truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation" in order to impart "the truth of the human heart" that is the main purpose of a "work of art" (3). In this way he excuses his use of "the Marvellous" as necessary for the purpose of the text (Ibid).

In the extract from the preface of "Rappaccini's Daughter" above, Hawthorne is essentially presenting the dichotomy between the fantastic/ideal and the real, which, as mentioned previously, is an intrinsic theme of the ensuing narrative. The real is associated with feelings; it is the "pathos," "tenderness," and "humor" that make a tale come "within the limits of our native earth," that is to say, make it perceptible and recognizable. In the quote it is further suggested that the key with which to read and enjoy de l'Aubépine's fictional writings is "to take them in precisely the proper point of view" because otherwise "they can hardly fail to look excessively like nonsense." Hawthorne, though, does not define what he means by "the proper

point of view," leaving the reader possibly slightly perplexed. Perhaps he is referring to his tale being in fact an allegory or perhaps he is alluding to the fact that the tale's narrator refrains from presenting a reliable/truthful point of view of the events and characters. As concluded in the previous section, this deliberate intention to disorient the reader is an intrinsic part of the tale and can be categorized as belonging to the notion of the poetical uncanny. In this part of the preface, Hawthorne implicitly proposes the possibility that the ensuing narrative potentially does not make any sense, and in this manner he indicates the limits of fictional representation at large. By referring to the fiction as being precisely just fiction, he points to the difficulties in creating credible and entertaining stories and shows how easily fictional writing can seem mere nonsense to the (untrained) reader. In this way, he deliberately puzzles the reader prior to the reading experience, investing him/her with the uncertainty of actually making any sense of the next twenty-something pages, and consequently with the risk of failing to "amuse a leisure hour." In this way, Hawthorne ironically relativizes the quality of his tale in addition to investing the reader with the responsibility of making sense of the story, while adopting the right perspective on the story and its characters. What Hawthorne is thus also insinuating is that some readers might not be capable of grasping the sense of the tale while not belonging to the category of a "brighter man."

The question of the story making sense is very present in the Hoffmann tales as well. The narrators interrupt the stories to comment on their creation and reception in several metafictional inserts. Where Hawthorne's narrator stays more in the shade, not addressing the reader directly or making any metafictional comments in the tale itself, Hoffmann's narrators are far more daring and play decisive parts in their stories. They are personally involved with the characters of the story as well as with the reader, who is continuously addressed directly as "dear reader."[18] There is a different proximity in the Hoffmann tales, but the implied question remains the same: Does the story make sense, and is it truthful?

In the earlier Hoffmann tale, "The Golden Pot," the narrator interrupts the story to express concern that the reader does not believe in the fantastic occurrences that the narrator has told about so far. Or rather, the narrator is afraid that he has not been able to write convincingly in order to make the reader believe in the fantastic universe into which the protagonist is being

initiated: "I fear that you may end up believing neither in Anselmus nor in Archivist Lindhorst [another key character in the story]" (20). The narrator entreats the reader to use his imagination to enter the "fairy realm of glorious wonders" (20) and promises that if he does this: "you will then believe that this magnificent realm is much nearer at hand than you had previously thought" (21). Thus Hoffmann in this tale thematizes both the making and the reception of the fiction. Just as Hawthorne does in his preface, Hoffmann makes the reader aware that the story is a creation and carries in its womb the possibility of not making any sense or of not being credible. Hoffmann's narrator, though, goes further than M. de l'Aubépine in that he promises his reader that the latter will attain epistemological expansion through the employment of imagination. Through the reading of the tale, the narrator attempts to bring the reader into a mental state like that of Anselmus, or rather, as Jochen Schmidt suggests, he endeavors to make the reader uphold the tension between the real and the ideal, between the sphere of life and the sphere of art, and by this means attain a higher level of consciousness; recognizing poetry in reality and reality in poetry (52). All that Hawthorne promises in his preface is to be entertained for an hour or two.

At the end of "The Golden Pot," Hoffmann brings the ironic metafiction and the considerations about the limitations of fictional writing to an extremely satirical position. The narrator is desperate to finish the tale but has great difficulties in doing so, expressing "a loss of confidence in his own ability to control the narrative or bring it to satisfactory conclusion" (H. Brown 187). To finish the tale, the narrator has to step into the house of one of his characters and in so doing experience the bliss of Atlantis in order to write about it. When the character Archivist Lindhorst invites the narrator to his house in order to help him write the ending of the story, the narrator completely becomes one of the characters in his own tale, and the distinction between narration and fiction, form and content, real and unreal is utterly dissolved. In this manner, and with great mastery, Hoffmann exploits to the fullest the play between the different narrative levels. The letter of invitation from Archivist Lindhorst, which is copied in full into the text, is emblematic for ironic metafiction. In this letter Archivist Lindhorst expresses regret at being exposed to the public since it might cause him professional as well as private-life problems to be known as a salamander. He closes the letter promising to help the narrator bring the work to completion:

> If, therefore, you wish to write the Twelfth Vigil, then leave your garret, come down your damned five flights of stairs, and pay me a visit. In the blue room with the palm-trees, with which you are already familiar, you will find suitable writing materials, and you may then acquaint your readers in a few words with what you have beheld. That will please them better than a lengthy account of a way of life which you yourself know only from hearsay. (80)

What is implied is that in order to be truthful, the writer has to know personally what he is writing about. The narrator has to experience Atlantis in order to be able to portray it in a way that makes sense for the reader. So too in Hawthorne's authorship the question of truthfulness plays an important role and, as written in the preface to "Rappaccini's Daughter," M. de l'Aubépine often uses allegory in order to come closer to a successful depiction of truth, even though "truth" in his case seems related more to a deeper significance of things rather than to the lifelike quality and first-hand experience of the things narrated, as is the case in "The Golden Pot."

"The Sandman" as well contains metafictional considerations about the writing of the story. After the uncommented reproduction of the three letters of Nathanael and Clara respectively, the narrator offers a sort of introduction to the ensuing narrated part of the tale. Again directly addressing the reader, the narrator writes about his considerations concerning the construction of the text or, more precisely, his reflections on which would be the best way to begin the narrative:

> "Once upon a time …" – the best way to begin any story, but too down-to-earth! "In the small provincial town of S. there lived …" – somewhat better: at least it provides some build-up to the climax. Or why not plunge *medias in res*: "'Go to the Devil!' cried the student Nathanael, wild-eyed with fury and terror, as the barometer-seller Giuseppe Coppola …". I had in fact written this down, when I fancied there was something comical in the student Nathanael looking wild-eyed; this story, however, is no laughing matter. (98)

This metafictional discourse is highly ironic and uncovers the artistic element of creation by referring to its construction. In an amateurish way, the narrator includes the reader in his reflections on how best to write the story, thereby implying how its success depends on the chosen narrative strategy. By

not choosing any of the suggested openings, though, but merely transcribing the three letters written between the protagonist Nathanael and his fiancée, thereby presenting the situation from two different individual points of view, the narrator abstains from taking a clear stand on how to present the events and is able to employ each of the different narrative approaches throughout his tale whenever he finds it suitable.

According to Gerhard Neumann, the most important theme of the tale is in fact not the traumatic happenings concerning Nathanael, but instead the complications that the narrator confronts in attempting to develop a narrative strategy with which to make the uncanny aesthetically credible (194). The narrator's specific problem is how to describe Nathanael's trauma so as to make it real, or rather, using Hawthorne's words from "Rappaccini's Daughter," to not "look excessively like nonsense." Neumann claims that Hoffmann with this tale endeavors to make "the failure to depict" a theme in itself, a theme labeled by Neumann as "to tell the untellable,"[19] and so the tale shares a fundamental theme with "The Golden Pot." The narrator is aware that the aesthetic reality can never equal reality itself, but he promises to do his best in portraying the characters as if the reader had seen them in real life, which was also Hawthorne's implicit promise in his presentation of M. de l'Aubépine's fictional productions. As in the case of "The Golden Pot," the narrator wants the reader to experience the fantastic sphere as an integral part of reality. After having expressed this aspiration, the narrator in "The Sandman" reaches the essentially poetological consideration "that the poet can do no more than capture the strangeness of reality, like the dim reflection in a dull mirror" (99). What is important then is to see this image in the right perspective. What Hoffmann later expresses in his "Serapiontic Principle," "the 'correct' way of looking is the fundamental challenge for the 'true' poet,"[20] is according to the Hoffmann scholar Hartmut Steinecke a theoretical expression of what "The Sandman" narratologically puts into practice (293). This "correct way of looking" is close to Hawthorne's "proper point of view" from the preface of "Rappaccini's Daughter," but whereas Hoffmann is talking about the writer's insight, Hawthorne is referring to how the reader approaches the text to make sense of it, thereby shifting the focus from creation to reception.

In "The Sandman" the narrator's dilettantism is expressed not only in his incapacity to begin the story, but also in the ambiguous way of telling it,

as discussed above in regards to the poetical uncanny: the narrator is unable to give a clear picture neither of the characters nor of the events. It seems as if this incapacity to paint a clear picture is a consequence of the narrator not having himself a clear inner image of the events and characters. Nicole Calian notes that since no clear and unequivocal point of view is given, the unity of the text becomes precarious (42).

In the second and last metafictional insert of "The Sandman," the narrator ironically relates and comments on the reactions to Nathanael's horrific and fatal discovery of being in love with a robot. The reader is told what further happened to the characters of the tale and informed about the general attitude toward Nathanael's story and the different explanatory theories prevailing in different layers of society. In this context, the theory of the professor of poetry and eloquence is quoted with apparent irony[21]: "My most esteemed ladies and gentlemen! Don't you see what lies behind all this? The entire matter is an allegory – an extended metaphor! You take my meaning! *Sapienti sat*!" (115). In this fashion, the professor and his kind are ridiculed for not being able to present a sensible explanation of the facts while instead turning to allegorical interpretation models. In the same way as in "Rappaccini's Daughter," Hoffmann is here relativizing the meaning of his tale pointing to its being "merely" an allegory, and accordingly not in need of any further explanation, potentially not making any sense at all. Nonetheless, both Hoffmann and Hawthorne are providing a key with which to grasp their tales.

As discussed in the previous section, the three tales compared in this paper have numerous affinities: their characters, their plots, their themes, as well as their narrative patterns and strategies. The narrative strategy chosen for "Rappaccini's Daughter" echoes that of "The Sandman": causing disorientation and uncanny uncertainty for the reader to the very end, without providing a final catharsis (in contrast to the fairytale ending of "The Golden Pot"). The analysis of this section shows that even the metafictional interruptions in Hoffmann's tales, dealing with the narrator's considerations about the possible success of his story and how to depict the events more convincingly, find their parallel in "Rappaccini's Daughter" via the ironic preface. As we have seen, however, Hawthorne does not introduce the typical Hoffmanian metafictional interruptions in his tale but instead presents his aesthetic and epistemological considerations in an ironic preface. In this

preface Hawthorne speaks about himself in the third person, thereby keeping a comfortable distance between himself and the reader and in sharp contrast to the close relationship between Hoffmann's narrators and implied readers.

The remarkable resemblances between "Rappaccini's Daughter" and the two Hoffmann tales are quite fascinating and thought-provoking. One may wonder, what made two authors on two different continents write such strikingly similar tales just about thirty years apart. Even though it is precarious to speak about a direct literary influence of Hoffmann on Hawthorne, I believe it is safe to speak about a definite transatlantic connection between the two authors, perhaps even of a common Romantic tendency leading to such similar artistic expressions. In my analysis I have sought to shed new light on these similarities, probing more deeply than has been done so far, beyond the surface level of plots and themes to a level of narrative style and aesthetic strategy. Thereby significant, demonstrated conclusions have been added to the cautious surmises of the critics Jessup and Canby from 1903: "The Germans of the Romantic School felt much as Hawthorne, and wrote somewhat like him, or he like them; that is about as far as it is safe to go" (11).

Nevertheless, the analysis has also revealed significant divergences. Hawthorne for example, as opposed to Hoffmann, almost ridicules his readers. The preface to "Rappaccini's Daughter" can in fact be read as a slightly arrogant warning: If you don't make sense of the story it's because you are not smart enough. The reader of "Rappaccini's Daughter" is in effect put to the test of making sense of the story, both on account of the narrator's refraining from supplying accurate and reliable information and also due to the story's surprise ending. Similarly, in "The Sandman," Hoffmann puts his reader to the test through indeterminate perspectives and the unreliability of both protagonist and narrator; nonetheless, Hoffmann never seems to doubt the intelligence of the reader as much as he doubts his own capacity as a writer. This major dissimilarity mirrors the very different personalities and levels of self-esteem of the two authors, as well as the cultural differences between the two. Even if sharing a certain Romantic temperament, the two authors Hawthorne and Hoffmann produced somewhat different expressions of this spirit. With his authoritative pride and sense of cultural superiority, as expressed in the preface to "Rappaccini's Daughter," Hawthorne's style contrasts the humble and self-doubtful disposition of his European colleague.

## Notes

[1] The review was first printed in *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1847, Vol. 35.

[2] Although from his notebooks, we know that Hawthorne read Tieck in the German original fifteen years prior to *The Marble Faun*.

[3] This paper is an adaptation of the MA thesis "Disorienting Strategies: A Comparative Analysis of Hoffmann and Hawthorne" presented at Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale" in the Fall of 2008 and granted the Premio Agostino Lombardo in 2009.

[4] Commonly considered the poetics of the author, it was articulated in the late collection of tales *The Serapion Brethren (Die Serapions-Brüder*, 1819/21).

[5] The original title of this encyclopedic work cataloguing a vast number of refuted errors is *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Inquiries Into Very Many and Received Tenets and Commonly Presumed Truths* from 1646. The anecdote written down by Hawthorne in his journal in 1839 is the tale retold in "Rappaccini's Daughter" about the beautiful but poisonous woman sent to King Alexander when he was in India with the intent to kill him. The woman had become poisonous by being "fed with aconites and other poisons" (272). The story is from "Book VII," Chapter XVI of the *Vulgar Errors*, see *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne* edited by Simon Wilkin (London, 1852) 272-273.

[6] The essay was originally entitled "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann" and published in the first issue of the Scottish *Foreign Quarterly Review* in 1827 (republished in America that same year), while renamed "Novels of Ernest Theodore Hoffmann" in the American collection of Scott's essays published in 1841. It constitutes the most important and influential review of Hoffmann in all of Europe and America in the nineteenth century. In the essay Scott presents an analysis of the supernatural in fiction while denoting Hoffmann as a pioneer of the fantastic mode of writing. Apart from a short biography, the article presents two of Hoffmann's early night pieces, "Das Majorat" ("The Entail," 1817) and "The Sandman," the latter of which is merely summarized.

[7] Curiously, Brodsky undermines her own supposition noting that Hawthorne probably did not know this specific tale of Hoffmann's, thus ignoring that is was translated into French in 1830 under the title *Le Botaniste* as part of Loèves-Veimars' Œuvres complètes de E.T.A. Hoffmann.

[8] *Dissertation Abstracts International* (Vol. 45, No. 10, April 1985). The Ph.D. dissertation is called *The Fantastic in the Fiction of Hoffmann and Hawthorne*, Pennsylvania State University.

[9] "künstlich geordnete Verwirrung" (my translation).

[10] In spite of the similarities postulated by Marks, Brodsky and Lundblad, I have chosen not to consider the later tale "The Datura Fastuosa" in this comparative reading since it differs widely from the other three tales examined in both thematic and narrative aspects.

[11] For a more extensive and detailed analysis regarding the conclusions drawn in this section see Mirjam Friediger, "Unreliable Perspectives and Disorienting Strategies. The Influence of E.T.A. Hoffmann on Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's Daughter'." *A.I.O.N.* Sezione Germanica, Annali, Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale," N.S. 20 (2010): 121-60.

[12] In "The Golden Pot," which constitutes the third volume of Hoffmann's first published collection *Fantasy Pieces in the Manner of Callot* (*Fantasiestücke in Callot's Manier,* 1814), the young student Anselmus has to go through difficult trials to win his beloved Serpentina in the German city of Dresden. He finds himself caught in a battle between good and evil natural forces and has to prove faithful to his sense of imagination. Like a proper fairytale, the story ends happily with Anselmus joining Serpentina in Atlantis, the lost paradise of poetry. As indicated by the tale's subtitle, "a modern fairytale," it is full of fairytale-like characters and supernatural events. "The Sandman," on the other hand, written about two years later as part of the collection *Night Pieces* (*Nachtstücke*, 1816), is an epistolary tale about the young student Nathanael, haunted by a childhood trauma, a horrifying experience including his father and another man that Nathanael identifies as the legendary figure the Sandman. Nathanael ends up killing himself in a fit of madness after falling in love with Olimpia, a mechanical doll that he believes to be a human being. In "Rappaccini's Daughter," young Giovanni Guasconti comes to the city of Padua to pursue his scientific studies and becomes attracted and almost possessed by the young beauty Beatrice, who dwells in the garden under his window. It turns out that Beatrice is poisonous like the flowers around her, and in the end it becomes clear that she has made Giovanni as poisonous as herself by infecting him with her breath. In a final dramatic scene in the garden, Giovanni accuses Beatrice of having set him up. She thereafter dies partly of heartbreak and partly due to an antidote given her by Giovanni. The antidote was meant to rescue the girl from her reclusive life by removing the poison from her body, but by removing the poison it extinguishes her very life source. The surprise ending of the tale insinuates that the maker of the antidote, Professor Baglioni, had in fact foreseen this outcome and actually plotted the killing of Beatrice, the experiment of Professor Baglioni's lifelong rival and Beatrice's father, Dr. Rappaccini.

[13] These include indeterminable statements such as "seem to be" and the use of modal verbs like *may*, *might*, *could*, *must* and adverbs such as *perhaps*, *possibly*, and *apparently*. When the narrator in "Rappaccini's Daughter" says that "Giovanni's fancy *must* have grown morbid while he looked down into the garden; for the impression which the fair stranger [Beatrice] made upon him was *as if* here were another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones" (75, my emphasis) the use of the underlined modal verbs and adverbs make it impossible to ascertain whether Giovanni's impressions do indeed correspond to reality.

[14] See for instance the episode when Giovanni, seeing from his window how the flowers he has just thrown to Beatrice immediately fade in her arms, convinces himself that "[I]t was an idle thought; there could be no possibility of distinguishing a faded flower from a fresh one at so great a distance" (81).

[15] Professor Baglioni, a colleague and rival of Dr. Rappaccini, seems to have schemed Beatrice's death in order to hinder Dr. Rappaccini's experiment of making his daughter poisonous. This is hinted at throughout the tale and again at the end, when he reveals himself as an onlooker of the dramatic scene of Beatrice's death in the garden, when she lies at the feet of her father and Giovanni. The last words of the tale (left uncommented on by the narrator) are those of Professor Baglioni calling out loud: "Rappaccini! Rappaccini! and is *this* the upshot of your experiment?" (99).

[16] According to Gillian Brown, this was the actual title of the tale in the original edition. It later on became the subtitle.

[17] The "Frenchified" pun-nickname "Monsieur de l'Aubépine" was given him by the "queer little Frenchman" Monsieur Schaeffer, with whom Hawthorne spent time while visiting his friend Horatio Bridge in Augusta, Maine, in July 1837. The young Schaeffer was lodging in the same place as Bridge, likewise nicknamed "Monsieur du Pont" by Schaeffer (Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks* 32).

[18] In German "günstiger Leser" implies a male person.

[19] "das nicht erzählbare zu erzählen" (my translation, Neumann 204).

[20] "das 'rechte' Schauen ist die Grundforderung an den 'wahren' Dichter" (my translation, *Die Serapions-Brüder* 293).

[21] It is comically reported in detail how the professor, before beginning to speak, solemnly had a pinch of snuff, shut the snuff box and cleared his throat.

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