Rappaccini’s Daughter
Nathaniel Hawthorne

• 1804 – 1864
• Best known for stories set in New England’s Puritan past (ex., *The Scarlet Letter*, “Young Goodman Brown”)
• Often labeled a *moralist*: “capacity to translate the *apparently* ordinary into moral epics and allegories of profound and often tragic consequence” (Introduction viii).
“RD” as Romance

• “The Romance in lofty and elevated language describes what has never happened nor is likely to.” (Clara Reeve)

• “…refers to works with extravagant characters, remote and exotic places, highly exciting and heroic events, passionate love, or mysterious or supernatural experiences.” (A Handbook to Literature)
“RD” as Gothic Tale

• “A novel in which magic, mystery, and chivalry are the chief characteristics. Horrors abound …” (A Handbook to Literature)

• “…atmosphere of brooding and unknown terror …” (A Handbook to Literature)
Romance and Gothic Elements

- **Romance**: A love story, set in Italy, at a beautiful garden, involving two beautiful young people; invokes the apparently supernatural
Romance and Gothic Elements

- **Gothic**: A love story (but a dark one), set in Italy (where passion rules), at a beautiful garden (that is poisonous), involving two beautiful young people (Beatrice described as “monstrous”); invokes the apparently supernatural (or science gone wrong)
Noted Themes

• The limits of science or scientific truth
• Technology as a malevolent force
• Garden of Eden vs. Garden of Rappaccini (utopia vs. dystopia)
• Moral culpability/ambiguity of Rappaccini, Beatrice, Giovanni, and Baglioni
Can you trace the "Tristan Myth" in Giovanni and Beatrice’s love?

- Love that is irrational, even detrimental to self
- Love that “transcends good and evil”; otherworldly
- Love driven by passion, absence, restraint, obstacles
- Love that leads to death
Can you apply the “Tristan Myth” to Giovanni and Beatrice’s love?

• Love that is irrational, even detrimental to self
  – “Such a suspicion … was inadequate to restrain him. The instant he was aware of the possibility of approaching Beatrice, it seemed an absolute necessity of his existence to do so. It mattered not whether she was angel or demon …” (22)
Can you apply the “Tristan Myth” to Giovanni and Beatrice’s love?

- Love that “transcends good and evil”; otherworldly
  - “… a meeting in the garden with Beatrice was no longer an incident in Giovanni’s daily life, but the whole space in which he might be said to live …” (29 – 30)
  - “[she] appeared to derive a pure delight from her communion with the youth, not unlike what the maiden of a lonely island might have felt conversing with a voyager from the civilised world” (26)
Can you apply the “Tristan Myth” to Giovanni and Beatrice’s love?

• Love driven by passion, absence, restraint, obstacles
  – “…her rich beauty was a madness to him” (19)
  – “Does not your worship see that I am in haste?” (20)
  – “He had never touched one of the gleaming ringlets of her hair” (30)
  – Beatrice is literally toxic, confined in a walled garden
Can you apply the “Tristan Myth” to Giovanni and Beatrice’s love?

• Love that leads to death
  – “… hope and dread kept a continual warfare in his breast. … It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions” (19)
  – “… her whole nature was so imbued with [poisons] that she herself had become the deadliest poison in existence. Poison was her element of life” (32)
  – Death preferable to life without passionate love
Comments?
Questions?