

FICTIONAL FILM ADAPTATION

“Rappaccini's Daughter” (1844)

Nathaniel Hawthorne

(1804-1864)

from *Hollywood* (2004)

...Eisley selected an adaptation of “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” a story by Nathaniel Hawthorne reduced to gothic horror. A young student falls in love with a girl who has adapted to a poisonous environment, then, lacking faith in her essential innocence, he subjects her to a test of her purity and to an antidote that kills her. Through a realtor Eisley got permission to shoot at an Italian villa in Beverly Hills that would pass as architecture of the sixteenth century.

After an establishing postcard shot of Padua with its great medieval university, he zoomed in on a window of the villa where the young student Giovanni stands looking down on Beatrice, a heavenly dark-haired woman in the garden below. He used the palmy tropical garden on a Fox backlot, taking close-ups of flytraps and cobra lilies and other exotics from low angles with sinister lighting, then magnified the plants to giant size. Strutz cast Vincent Price as Professor Rappaccini, the proud scientist who plays God by creating a poisonous new Eden to protect his daughter Beatrice, the polluted paradise of the modern world. Tall and bent and garbed in black, Price had appropriately pointy features, a fastidious mustache and a refined lispy voice. Boris Karloff played Professor Baglioni, the vindictive rival scientist who gives Giovanni a deadly potion instead of an apple....

Rappaccini and Baglioni he shot in sharp focus, often from extremely low angles that made them look tall and domineering with grotesque shadows. In one scene he showed the scientists as nothing but talking heads, otherwise concealed by foliage. He shot the innocent Beatrice in a bright white dress with soft focus and in luminous glowing close-ups that gave her a spiritual look evoking her namesake in Dante, including a motif of the men touching their heads while Beatrice touches her heart. In the end, Giovanni is dismayed to realize that he has killed her....

Michael Hollister
from Chapter 12
Hollywood (2004)