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and death, body and soul are no more than a wrangling with words” (p. 201).

Dayan’s is a tough-minded book, requiring of the reader the same careful attention she has applied to Poe. Although at times assertive rather than demonstrative, opaque rather than clear, it nonetheless rewards the diligent reader with an insightful explication of the intricacies of Poe’s thought and art. Several books about Poe have appeared recently; Dayan’s is one of the more important.

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Hawthorneans who cut their literary teeth on the formalism of New Criticism have persistently looked askance on psychoanalytic interpretations of Hawthorne’s works. Biographically oriented readings have likewise been suspect. Gloria Erlich’s authoritative and illuminating book should compel such purists to reconsider their position. With a thorough knowledge of Hawthorne’s fiction at her disposal, Erlich combines psychological theory and a close reading of the Hawthorne-Manning family correspondence to identify a network of family themes that form the substructure of Hawthorne’s writing. Not only does she provide valuable information about a period of Hawthorne’s life that biographers have largely ignored—the childhood years that were dominated by his uncle Robert Manning, but she also gives us new insights into such perplexing and psychologically disturbing stories as “The Wives of the Dead” and “Roger Malvin’s Burial.”

It has taken almost twenty years for the Oedipal conflicts analyzed by Frederick Crews in *The Sins of the Fathers* (1966) to be related to a real-life father surrogate. Erlich convincingly identifies Uncle Robert in the role and documents the ambivalent relationship Hawthorne had with his mother’s brother, the man upon whom he had to rely for guidance and support after his father’s death, but whose authority he nevertheless resented. The form that this latent hostility takes in Hawthorne’s fiction is outlined by Erlich; one motif will immediately be recognized by Hawthorne buffs—“the triangular pattern of a young man, a sexually tempting young woman, and an older man who has a blighting effect on the younger one.” Readers will also encounter an occasional fillip. Who would have credited Uncle Robert’s scientific management of his
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Salem fruit orchards with having contributed to Hawthorne’s aversion to horticultural experimentation? “Rappaccini’s Daughter” thereby acquires another dimension.

The third chapter, “The Inner Circle: Hawthorne’s Women,” details how Hawthorne’s mother and two sisters shaped his concept of women and became models for his fictional creations. Most attention will undoubtedly be paid to Erlich’s startling and original proposal that the image of the “sexually tempting but taboo dark woman” to be found repeatedly in Hawthorne’s fiction has its source in repressed incestuous feelings toward his sister Elizabeth.

Equally novel and provocative in Erlich’s account of how Hawthorne came to write his acknowledged masterpiece, The Scarlet Letter. Her book actually begins in medias res, with Hawthorne at his midlife crisis. Drawing on Daniel Levinson’s and Erik Erikson’s theories about midlife creativity and the adult life cycle, Erlich clarifies the burst of creative activity that marked Hawthorne’s career at the age of forty-five, the year that his mother died and that he lost his custom-house job. Of less general interest is the concluding chapter. Readers may find it as painful to read about Doctor Grimshawe’s Secret as those who have tried to read this chaotic and fragmented unfinished novel have found the work itself. Both pieces should, however, be required reading for those die-hards who disdain the relevance of a psychological approach. Hawthorne’s failure artistically to control the compulsive deep-rooted forces within him in his final writing attempts gives us a clear picture of the obsessive themes that he elsewhere skilfully embodies in some of his best works.

In her preface, Erlich explains what her book is and is not: “It is not a literary biography or a psychobiography or a work of literary criticism, although it has elements of all three. Perhaps we should call it a thematic study of the continuities between Hawthorne’s life and art, the psychological and experiential sources of his fiction.” The book does indeed defy categorization, but we do not have to pigeonhole it to recognize it for what it is—a valuable piece of scholarship and criticism. It has already won its author the prestigious MLA Prize for Independent Scholars, generated a paperback edition, and become a staple reference on the Hawthorne circuit (I noted at least two acknowledgements in papers read at the 1986 Hawthorne Society conference in Maine). Erlich’s study will continue to serve scholars and aficionados alike. She has given us an opportunity to better understand the man and his works.

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