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Debbie Lopez

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the 'Gordian Knot' of  
Relations Between  
Keats and Hawthorne

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Debbie Lopez

## Liberties with *Lamia*: The ‘Gordian Knot’ of Relations Between Keats and Hawthorne

It was not love, although her rich beauty was a madness to him; nor horror, even while he fancied her spirit to be imbued with the same baneful essence that seemed to pervade her physical frame; but a wild offspring of both love and horror that had each parent in it, and burned like one and shivered like the other. Giovanni knew not what to dread; still less did he know what to hope; yet hope and dread kept a continual warfare in his breast, alternately vanquishing one another and starting up afresh to renew the contest. Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne’s ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’

Apart from the arguments made for *Lamia* as a source for ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter,’ most scholars concede, as Robert Weisbuch does, that the relationship between Keats and Hawthorne is one of mere ‘epistemological playmates’.<sup>1</sup> Yet, however tentatively made any exploration about links between the two authors, at least two can be proposed concretely: the cases made for Keats’s *Lamia* as a source for ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’ are substantive; and in ‘P.’s Correspondence,’ Hawthorne devotes a great deal of space to depicting the poet as a dreamy aesthete, leasing (like *Lamia*’s Lycius) a delusive paradise lost. While these two connections may seem unrelated, they are not.

As Anne Mellor and Susan Wolfson have argued, the tendency of British reviewers was to ‘feminize’ Keats. When William Hazlitt wrote ‘On Effeminacy of Character,’ Keats was its chief model. Wolfson argues persuasively that this depiction had roots in Keats’s works themselves: Keats’s repeated figuring in nineteenth-century discussion as feminine or effeminate is not an arbitrary or wilful misreading. It reflects and reinscribes, with varying degrees of ideological pressure,