

Rappiccini's daughter



In Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, "Rappaccini's Daughter," the central female character, Beatrice Rappaccini, is controlled by three male figures in the story. The male characters, Giovanni, Baglioni, and her father all exploit Beatrice for individual reasons. Ironically, each male character claims to have her best interest at heart, but ultimately they all play a vital role in her demise. While Beatrice may have been superficially poisonous, the true poisoners in the story are the male characters, and their motives for seeking power and control. Beatrice's father, Dr.

Rappaccini, can be seen as the original poisoner in the story. He alone is responsible for Beatrice's poisonous nature, and she is undeniably his creation. Dr. Rappaccini is also the creator of the purple plant which Beatrice refers to as her "sister" (2454). Baglioni later explains that because of Dr. Rappaccini's "insane zeal for science" (2466) he exposed his daughter to the poison which ultimately led to her living a life of complete isolation. This life of isolation which Beatrice is forced into is direct result from her father's science and quest for knowledge. Dr.

Rappaccini takes advantage of Beatrice and uses her isolation as way of maintaining control of her. By making her poisonous, Beatrice is completely dependent upon her father, and is unable to live life on her own terms. At the end of the story when Beatrice asks her father why he would "inflict this miserable doom" (2470) upon her, his reply reveals his true motives.

Rappaccini remarks, "What mean you, foolish girl? Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvelous gifts, against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy...Wouldst thou, then, have preferred he condition of a weak woman.. (2470). Truthfully, Beatrice never desired the power that her

poisonous nature. It was Dr. Rappaccini's quest for power and Beatrice merely served as a tool for him to acquire it. Giovanni, the central male character of the story, is the second figure to serve as a poisoner to Beatrice. From the moment Giovanni first sees her, he develops an obsession with the mysterious daughter of Dr. Rappaccini. After seeing Beatrice, he constantly allows his imagination to take flight with the idea of her, and in the process he mixes reality and illusion.

At various points in the story he even stops himself to ask, " Am I awake? Have I my senses? " (2457) His obsession with her causes Giovanni to create unrealistic ideas of who Beatrice truly is. When reality conflicts with the image of Beatrice that Giovanni has conjured up, it is then that his desire to control and manipulate her becomes especially evident. In one particular scene, after being convinced of Beatrice's poisonous condition, Professor Baglioni presents Giovanni with an " exquisitely wrought silver phial" (2466) containing an antidote to cure Beatrice.

Giovanni accepts the antidote largely due to his inability to accept her as she is, and his desire to transform her into the person he would prefer for her to be. Giovanni, like her father, wishes to control Beatrice and have the power to change her. After his fears are confirmed that Beatrice is poisonous, and not the woman he dreamed her to be, he informs her of the antidote which she readily takes. Instead of curing her, the antidote has a reverse effect and causes her to die. In her last statement to Giovanni, Beatrice asks, " Oh was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine? (2470).

Giovanni unknowingly poisons her with the contents of the phial but also by he himself, and his desire for control over her. Professor Baglioni is the final

male character to act as a poisoner to Beatrice. Throughout the story, Baglioni plays a seemingly harmless role by acting as a mentor to Giovanni. He does, however, let on that he sees Beatrice as a threat to his position. Baglioni remarks, " She is already qualified to fill a professor's chair. Perchance her father destines her for mine! " (2456).

While he may have a professional rivalry with Dr. Rappaccini, he uses Beatrice as a way to get revenge on Dr. Rappaccini and his scientific advances. It is through professor Baglioni that Giovanni gets the antidote which he believes will cure her of her poisonous condition. Baglioni expertly manipulates both Giovanni and Beatrice. The antidote, instead of curing her condition, actually causes her to die. Similar to both Dr. Rappaccini and Giovanni, Professor Baglioni, is also driven by the desire for control and power.

He is threatened by both Beatrice and her father, and ultimately he poisons her as a way of ensuring that he will have ultimate control of the situation. After Beatrice dies, Professor Baglioni gloats, " Rappaccini! Rappaccini! And is this the upshot of your experiment? " (2470). The final statement reveals that his quest for power, was the poison that ultimately led him to go to such extreme measurements to ensure that he would not be out done. While Beatrice is often viewed as the character responsible for being the source of poison in the story, she is in fact, only one of many.

Each of the male characters in the story also acts a poisoner. While their physical condition may have lacked poisonous characteristics that Beatrice's contained, they each play a significant role in her ultimate demise. Dr.

Rappaccini, Giovanni, and Professor Baglioni prove that they are poisoners themselves, and the motives of power and control being the most lethal poison of all. Works Cited Hawthorne, Nathaniel. " Rappaccini's Daughter. " The Heath Anthology of American Literature. Ed. Paul Lauter. York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. 2451-2470. Print.