

Rappaccini's daughter

Religion



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" Rappaccini's Daughter" Would you sacrifice your only daughter so you could gain notoriety among your colleagues? Or consider killing a man's daughter for the purpose of thwarting him? This is the basic theme in Nathaniel Hawthorne's story " Rappaccini's Daughter". Dr. Rappaccini, Professor Baglioni, and Giovanni all seem to prefer ideas over human life. Dr. Rappaccini has devoted his entire life to the pursuit of scientific knowledge. He views human beings as experiments. " He would sacrifice human life, his own among the rest...for the sake of adding...to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge. " (Page 24). He uses his daughter to create a poisonous generation, and defends his choices even as she is dying. He exploits her to gain knowledge and further advance in the field of science. Professor Baglioni is jealous of Dr. Rappaccini's success. Throughout the story he devises ways to defeat him. On page 30, he states that Rappaccini's daughter " shall be looked to. Perchance, most learned Rappaccini, I may foil you where you little dream of it! " He also believes that, because Beatrice has been educated by her father, she is a professional rival. " I know little of the Signora Beatrice, save that Rappaccini is said to have instructed her deeply in his science, and that, young and beautiful as fame reports her, she is already qualified to fill a professor's chair. Perchance her father destines her for mine! " (Page 25). He provides an antidote that he knows will kill Beatrice, and after she dies he turns the blame onto Dr. Rappaccini. " And is this the upshot of your experiment? " (Page 47). Giovanni believes he is superior to other men because of his ability to hold Beatrice's interest while other men can only dream of being with her. He sees Beatrice as a possession he must own despite the risk of becoming poisonous himself. He seems to desire a sexual union with her, but a commitment to her may allow

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him to be dominated by a woman. Once he realizes that he has become poisonous, he becomes extremely angry toward her. " She is the only being whom my breath will not slay! Would that it might! " (Page 42). After his anger subsides, he starts thinking about the antidote and believes it can restore both of them to normal. " Besides, thought Giovanni, might there not still be a hope of his returning within the limits of ordinary nature, and leading Beatrice-the redeemed Beatrice-by the hand? " (Page 45). He gives it to her and she tells him that she will drink it first and he is to await the results. If he truly loved her, he would not have allowed her to experiment with a potion he knew nothing about. As Beatrice lay dying, the three men she trusted and loved the most each had different thoughts. Dr. Rappaccini defends himself, trying to make her believe she had a wonderful life that others are jealous of. Professor Baglioni is triumphant because he has destroyed the doctors' experiment and exposed the folly of his colleague. Giovanni seems only to be concerned with the fact that he will never be able to re-enter normal society. They each had a hand in killing a human being for their own benefit.