

Rappaccini's daughter by nathaniel hawthorne



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Within Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Rappaccini's Daughter," Rappaccini is allegedly a cruel, cold, and evil father as he represents himself as a scientist attempting a poisonous experiment on his angelic daughter, Beatrice. In the midst of this experiment, Giovanni, a young man who looks over Beatrice in her father Rappaccini's garden, watches her daily from outside his window as he falls deeply in love with her. Unfortunately, Beatrice is extremely different from other women. Due to the contamination from the poison experiment in her father's garden, she cannot physically touch anyone, or that person will be destined to die. Therefore, Beatrice is doomed forever and cannot leave the garden. Rappaccini is a forbidding and malevolent man who has no problem ignoring humankind. He simply enjoys entertaining himself by producing poisons from the plants in his garden; he longs to advance his understanding through experimentation. As Giovanni and Beatrice fall deeper in love with one another by the end of the story, he attempts to save her from the poison by using a phial with the help of Baglioni, a family friend, professor, and enemy of Rappaccini's. Unfortunately, Giovanni takes his chance and touches a purple flower, now becoming contaminated with the poison. Beatrice drinks the phial in the hopes of saving her life, but it ends up killing her instead. During Beatrice's last few breaths in "Rappaccini's Daughter," she is questioning her father wondering why he has prevented her from becoming whom she was made to be, and consequently, Rappaccini is careless, while Giovanni and Baglioni are left with feelings of disbelief and fear.

Throughout Hawthorne's short story, each character is significant in portraying the main idea. Rappaccini, one of the main characters who is a "

tall, emaciated, sallow, and sickly looking man, dressed in a scholar's garb of black" (407). Rappaccini is merely a scientist who would " sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge" (Hawthorne 410). Therefore, it is assumed that Rappaccini solely cares about the science of his experiment, and not the actual subject, or person in this case, that he is applying the experiment to. Another important character, Beatrice, whom is Rappaccini's daughter, is the girl that Giovanni has overlooked and become interested in. Her father has unfortunately cursed her with poisons from his evil garden. Therefore, she cannot leave the garden because if she physically touches anything at all, such as the flower bouquet given to her from Giovanni, it will die and wither immediately. Beatrice remains stagnant throughout most of the story, only dreaming of the poison leaving her body one moment at a time. The protagonist in Hawthorne's story, Giovanni, is a young, studious, and curious man who becomes enthralled by Beatrice and the poison bestowed within her. When Giovanni first saw Beatrice, he was a student studying at the university. His first thoughts of Beatrice were simply beauty, but of course is later exposed to her poisonous nature and thus sees her as indescribably unspeakable. Giovanni is a man who had compassion, but who gave it to the wrong woman. Ultimately, curiosity is driven from the suspense of the poisoned Beatrice, and as the story progresses Giovanni becomes extremely bitter and angry, especially once he kills her with the phial. Professor Baglioni, another main character, is a helpful man who is a Professor of Medicine at the University as well as Giovanni's advisor. He is a physician with a distinguished reputation known for his cheerfully old habits and

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nature. He and Rappaccini do not like one another; Baglioni believes Rappaccini to be an immoral scientist. Although, Baglioni is more and more like Rappaccini than he wants to believe he is. At the end of the story Beatrice's death gives him a tone of "triumph mixed with horror" (Jones 163). Ultimately, Baglioni is the man who provides the antidote to be given to Beatrice, and thus the "cure" that actually destroyed her in the end of the story. Therefore, it is believed that Baglioni also possesses the same qualities that his enemy, Rappaccini possesses- he values science and its outcome more than Beatrice, or humanity as a whole, innocent and all.

In addition to each characters' qualities and purpose in the story, some things are also said and done that help the story progress. For example, when Giovanni confronts Beatrice about the poisonous plant, she reveals that her father created it, and that she knew of its dangerous powers, as well as its effect on her. Giovanni curses her for severing him from the world and knowingly entrancing him into the same horrible state. Beatrice is shocked of course, and gravely upset by this. She swears ignorance, and although Giovanni comes to believe her, his words had already hurt her deeply. Giovanni doesn't realize the weight of his words and believes he can still save her, so he gives her the antidote, which she willingly drinks. Rappaccini explains that the reason he made Beatrice poisonous was to give her power. The power to protect herself but also the power to know that she could kill anyone with just her touch. Another example is the way Dr. Baglioni causes problems in his perception of Beatrice. Baglioni is a rival of Rappaccini and knows that Beatrice is an experiment of his. He persuades Giovanni into drinking a vile, hoping that he can save her, but ends up taking her life

instead and stating, "as poison had been life, so the powerful antidote was death" (425). As Giovanni confronts Beatrice about the poisonous plant she reveals that her father created it. She also claims that she knew of its dangerous powers, as well as its effect on her ultimately. Giovanni curses her for separating him from the world and consciously engrossing him into the same horrible state. Beatrice is shocked of course, and grimly upset by this. She execrates ignorance, and although Giovanni comes to believe her, his words had already gone too far and hurt her deeply. Giovanni does not realize the how heavy his words are and believes he can still save Beatrice. Subsequently, Giovanni struggles with the idea of Beatrice being poisoned and finds trouble in the fact that things around her and the garden are dying. At first, he thought things were just being imagined, but he is later told that her condition could be due to being raised around an abundance of poison, or that she was part of an experiment for her father. Giovanni's main concern is that he finds Beatrice to be beautiful and intriguing, but also very poisonous and dangerous. In relation to one another Edward Abramson states in an article that, "Giovanni, Rappaccini, and Baglioni each treat Beatrice with a moral carelessness that relates not merely to their human limitations, their desire for self aggrandizement, but also in their denial of Beatrice's humanity to evil" (30).

In addition to the characters in Hawthorne's short story, the setting also plays a major role in determining the purpose of "Rappaccini's Daughter." The setting could be described as a dark, cruel place. However, it could also be described as a brilliant, fresh start. The story takes place in the nineteenth century in Padua, Italy in an apartment with a view onto

Rappaccini's garden. Within this garden, Rappaccini allows evil to be present, but because of the love that his daughter Giovanni and Beatrice share, the setting actually becomes a "home." Therefore, this setting becomes a peaceful presence that they long to stay for as long as possible. Although, unfortunately, the poisons that Giovanni was cursed with stand stronger than the passion she feels. In an article about the purpose of the setting in this story, John Franzosa states "Perhaps the most curious and mystifying aspect of "Rappaccini's Daughter" is the tale's rich—almost decadent—surface. Unlike the language of most of Hawthorne's earlier tales, which by contrast seems almost spare and transparent, that of "Rappaccini's Daughter" is striking in its superfluity, its "luxuriance"" (1).

Finally, the symbolism arranged throughout Hawthorne's short story is significant in portraying what the story really entails. As Giovanni views the garden from his lofty window, the author proposes his perspective on the intricacy of good and evil embodied in Beatrice. He is distant from the garden as he looks down upon it every day. When he first begins to understand that she is dangerous, he overlooks his suspicions and curiosity as imaginary. However, as he becomes more concerned with himself than with her in her poisonous state, he eventually calls her a "poisonous thing" who has contaminated him, making him "as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself—a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity" as Beatrice (Crews 415). By the end of the story, his selfishness completely blinds him to her potential goodness, and as a result, he gives her the antidote hoping to redeem her from her evil nature and save her, hoping for a life of love together without any harm. At the end of the Hawthorne's story,

Beatrice states, " But now it matters not; I am going, father, where the evil, which thou hast striven to mingle with my being, will pass away like a dream—like the fragrance of these poisonous flowers, which will no longer taint my breath among the flower of Eden" (425). Rappaccini, occasionally compared by critics to God and other times to Satan, has the ability to look into the " inmost nature" of the plants in his garden as he analyzes observations in regard to their creative principle. Crews goes on to mention a few other symbols throughout the short story - " The garden's shattered fountain and its pure water are emblematic of the flesh-spirit antithesis, and the gorgeous purple shrub, fed by this water yet fatal to the touch, combines the opposed powers in an ambiguous mixture exactly paralleling Beatrice's own duality" (404) and " Beatrice, a prototype of womanhood, is " the very embodiment of the central Christian paradox-angelic but corrupt, beautiful but damned" (403). Therefore, just as the garden of Eden story dealing with Adam and Eve from the Bible, Beatrice and Giovanni can relate in this way. Hawthorne's story reads that Giovanni did not hesitate when Beatrice asked him to come into the garden. The story reads, " Giovanni! Giovanni! Why tarriest thou? Come down!—And down he hastened into that Eden of poisonous flowers" (418).

In conclusion, Rappaccini poisoned his daughter for not only science, but also to make her powerful and even more beautiful. " Rappaccini was proud of himself and his accomplishments. He doesn't understand Beatrice's dissatisfaction with her condition. Rappaccini believes he has given his daughter a great gift of strength and power. What Beatrice sees as a curse, her father sees as a blessing." In the core of Beatrice's death, she states, " I

would fain have been loved, not feared" (Hawthorne 425). This statement reevaluates Beatrice's heartfelt struggle throughout the story. While she longs for love, she remains much more fearful due to being isolated from the poisons within her. In the end, Beatrice dies from the antidote Giovanni gives her. This makes her a better person than all three men because, in the end, she controls her own body that all of them were trying to "fix" by either making her poisonous or trying to cure her of the poison and treating her like an experiment rather than a human. The characters, setting, dialect, and the symbolism all work together to make "Rappaccini's Daughter" the short story that it is. Franzosa states, "Like Beatrice's wish to be 'loved and not feared'- is a wish for a simplicity which has been given up and may, in fact, never have existed. Like the garden, 'redundant with life,' simple perceptions and thus simple emotions have become reduplicated, mixed, and implicated in each other. As the author puts it, perhaps somewhat nostalgically, '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 region' (p. 105)" (13). As she is dying she tells him, "Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like led within my heart—but they, too, will fall away as I ascend. Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?" (425). Instead of helping Beatrice with the antidote, Giovanni unfortunately kills her allowing the story to be left with fear and grief of the what has been left unsaid.

Works Cited

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