Rappaccini's Daughter

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born to Nathaniel Hathorne and Elizabeth Clarke Manning on Independence Day in 1804. He was also a descendant of John Hathorne, the only judge in the Salem witch trials who never apologized for his participation. In his early twenties, Hawthorne legally changed his last name slightly, adding the "w" so he would not be associated with his great-great-grandfather. He attended Bowdoin College, Class of 1825, but reported that he preferred getting into scrapes over paying attention to his studies. In 1842, Hawthorne joined a transcendentalist utopian community at Brook Farm—not because he agreed with the movement but in order to save up for marriage. Hawthorne wed Sophia Peabody in 1842. By all accounts, they enjoyed a happy union. Together they had three children named Una, Julian, and Rosa. He published his first work in 1828 and his most famous novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, in 1850. Hawthorne was part of the Romantic literary movement, which emphasized the importance of the individual and the subjective experience. He was the contemporary of many American literary giants, including Herman Melville, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Edgar Allan Poe. In addition to writing, Hawthorne held a number of political positions, such as U.S. consul in Liverpool, England while his former classmate, Franklin Pierce, was president of the United States. After experiencing chronic stomach pains, Hawthorne died in his sleep on May 19, 1864 during a vacation in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After the rise and fall of the Greco-Roman Empire, Italy fell into the Middle Ages (500-1300 A.D.), where long-cultivated skills were lost and access to new information was increasingly limited. Italians turned to the Catholic faith as a respite when the Black Plague and other mysterious diseases regularly killed city dwellers overnight. It was during this period that Dante Alighieri wrote the *Divine Comedy*, which explores realms of the afterlife according to Christianity. During the Italian Renaissance (1400-1600s), artists and prominent thinkers began to revisit the ideas of the Greco-Roman Empire. Modern science was born during the Enlightenment (1600-1800s), when prominent thinkers began to prize reason, skepticism, and a scientific approach to gaining knowledge. Hawthorne's short story explores the clash between Enlightenment-era reason and the Middle Ages faith mindset.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Rappaccini's Daughter relies on the popular Indian trope of *Visha Kanya*, young women assassins whose bodily fluids are poisonous. References to Visha Kanya date as far back as the 4th century B.C. during the reign of Maurya Emperor Chandragupta. The name Beatrice comes from Italian poet Dante Alighieri's famous epic, *Divine Comedy*, written in the 14th century A.D. The poem's exploration of hell, purgatory, and heaven mirrors the discussion of purity and corruption that Hawthorne explores in this short story. Due to the Italian setting and tragic ending, *Rappaccini's Daughter* reminds readers of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as well as *Othello*. *Romeo and Juliet* features death by poison as well as misinformation. *Othello* includes a protagonist who doubts the good intentions of his lover. Authors after Hawthorne continued to use Northern Italy as the setting for works that address moral decline, including Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Rappaccini's Daughter
- **When Written:** 1844
- **Where Written:** Concord, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1844
- **Literary Period:** Romanticism
- **Genre:** Tragedy
- **Setting:** Padua, Italy
- **Climax:** Rappaccini's daughter drinks the supposed antidote and dies.
- **Antagonist:** Rappaccini
- **Point of View:** Omniscient third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Role Model. Nathaniel Hawthorne was very well respected in his own time. In fact, Herman Melville thought so highly of Nathaniel Hawthorne that he dedicated *Moby Dick* to Hawthorne.

Stranger Than Fiction. The idea of a poisonous woman may seem far-fetched to modern minds, but the true story of Gloria Ramirez, "The Toxic Lady," bears a striking resemblance to Hawthorne's tale. In 1994, multiple hospital workers became ill after coming into contact with this patient's body. Autopsy results could not explain what had gone wrong, though speculation continues to this day.

PLOT SUMMARY

"Rappaccini's Daughter" begins long ago, in the Italian city of Padua, where Giovanni Guasconti has recently moved to study medicine. His lack of money compels him to rent a room in a dilapidated manor that once housed an aristocratic family. Giovanni immediately notices a small garden outside his window and asks a local, Dame Lisabetta, whether it belongs to this house or the neighboring plot. Lisabetta informs him that an old doctor lives there and experiments with the many varieties of poisonous plants that he grows in the garden.

Just then, the old doctor, Giacomo Rappaccini, emerges, tending the plants with care. One especially beautiful shrub with purple **flowers** sits in the middle of a fountain. Rappaccini is so wary of its potency that he calls his daughter, Beatrice, and asks her to care for it from now on. Beatrice is a light-hearted and stunning young woman who embraces the shrub as her sister. Giovanni is perplexed—why should Beatrice be so at ease with the flowers when Rappaccini avoided their poison? He resolves to himself to approach the matter rationally.

Giovanni raises this question to a family friend and mentor, Professor Pietro Baglioni. Baglioni is the professional rival of Rappaccini and is displeased to hear his pupil taking an interest in Rappaccini. Baglioni claims that Rappaccini is a genius but cold-hearted—uninterested in humanity except insofar as experimenting on his patients gains scientific knowledge. Baglioni warns Giovanni to beware of any dealings with the Rappaccinis and privately vows to protect Giovanni using his medical knowledge.

Giovanni returns home to witness a strange sight—both Beatrice and the purple flowers seem to kill whatever living thing crosses their path. Giovanni also catches Beatrice's eye that night and tosses her a bouquet he purchased on a whim. It seems to wilt in her hands. Giovanni ponders his recollection of the night for many days with increasing agitation.

Lisabetta offers to show Giovanni a path to the garden, fundamentally altering how he interacts with Beatrice. As soon as the two meet in the garden, Giovanni throws caution to the wind and courts Beatrice. She requests that he only evaluate her based on what she says, not what he sees of her. Giovanni consents. At the end of this encounter, Giovanni reaches to touch the purple flowers, but Beatrice yanks his hand away. Where she touched him, his wrist becomes bruised and aching for several days, further confirming that her body is poisonous.

As their romance progresses, Giovanni continues to scrutinize each encounter to determine whether Beatrice's soul is pure or corrupt. He changes his mind moment-to-moment based on her mood and behavior, and his quandary quickly spirals into obsession. When he chances to meet Baglioni again, Baglioni reaffirms that Giovanni should beware. Rappaccini himself also passes by during that encounter, and both Baglioni and Giovanni agree that Rappaccini gave the young man a particularly searching look.

Days go by in a lovers' haze for Giovanni before Baglioni pays him a visit in his room, noting that Giovanni's room smells faintly of poisonous flowers. He then tells a story about how Alexander the Great was gifted a woman from India only to discover that her body was poisonous. Baglioni asserts that he has discovered Beatrice is the modern version of such a woman, made deadly by her father's experiments, but he has secured an antidote from a colleague. Steering Giovanni's course, Baglioni charges him to confront Beatrice and encourage her to drink it.

Giovanni leaves Baglioni to attend his regular meeting with Beatrice. On his way, he buys flowers for her, thinking that if they wilt in her hand, he will have proof that she is poisonous. However, gazing at his handsome body in a **mirror**, Giovanni discovers that his hands are wilting the flowers, implying that he himself has become poisonous. In a rage, he confronts Beatrice, furious that she has intentionally made him like her. Shocked, Beatrice insists that she never intended to harm him, only to love him for a little while. She says her father must have done it.

Giovanni hands her the antidote, explaining that it may restore them both to health. Rappaccini joins them, gazing at the two proudly. He explains that their poisonous bodies protect them from any harm mankind would wish to inflict. But Beatrice contends she would have preferred being loved than feared by her fellow man, and she drinks the potion. As she dies, she asks Giovanni whether he did not have more poison in his soul than she. Baglioni, who has been watching the scene from Giovanni's window, cries out in triumph and horror, rebuking Rappaccini for creating a monster stranger than fiction in his attempt to interfere with Nature.

CHARACTERS

Giovanni Guasconti – Giovanni, the story's protagonist, is a young man who has recently moved to Padua to pursue his medical studies. He is exceedingly handsome, and he considers himself to be a man of reason. However, as soon as he lays eyes on Rappaccini's garden of poisonous **plants** and—more to the point—Rappaccini's daughter, Beatrice, Giovanni develops an intense, all-consuming focus on this young woman. From his apartment window, Giovanni sees Beatrice kill organisms with her touch and breath. Instead of setting aside this strange encounter, he fantasizes about the beautiful yet deadly woman day and night. Upon meeting Beatrice face-to-face, he discovers she has a simple, virtuous personality. Giovanni becomes desperate to determine whether she is good, which her demeanor suggests, or evil, as her poisonous effect on others implies. Unfortunately, this handsome man is too

preoccupied with his incorrect inference that she is evil (based on her effect on plants and animals) to accurately discern his lover's true nature, which is good and pure. When Giovanni develops symptoms of becoming poisonous himself, he cruelly (and falsely) accuses Beatrice of transferring her poison to him. Giovanni gives her a potion that his mentor, Baglioni, said would cure her, but it winds up killing her instead. As Beatrice dies, she asks whether Giovanni did not have more poison in his nature than she. Giovanni's betrayal demonstrates how mankind's preoccupation with reason and science can cause people to miss what is true.

Beatrice Rappaccini – Beatrice is Giovanni's love interest, Doctor Rappaccini's daughter, and the source of the story's controversy. By raising her in his garden of poisonous flowers, Rappaccini has raised Beatrice to be poisonous to any living thing—yet despite her toxic body, Beatrice is the epitome of moral virtue. Her name is an allusion to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which Dante's deceased love interest (also named Beatrice) acts as his guide through Heaven. Likewise, Hawthorne's Beatrice is pious, crossing herself even when seemingly inconsequential creatures like the lizard and fly pass away. She is overflowing with love for every living thing she encounters, including the poisonous **flowers** in her father's garden. When she meets Giovanni, the two quickly fall in love. She asks him endless questions about the outside world, which she is forbidden to visit. Her childlike wonder, coupled with her trust in Giovanni, reveal that goodness and innocence can exist even in a body that is outwardly corrupt. Giovanni does not realize this possibility, so as soon as his own body begins to demonstrate symptoms of poison, he jumps to the conclusion that Beatrice intended to harm him. When Giovanni confronts her, she is heartbroken at his mistrust, revealing that she never meant him ill. In a show of selfless love, she drinks the potion that Baglioni says is an antidote before she will let Giovanni try some. That way, his body cannot come to harm if it is in fact poison. In her last moments, Beatrice tells her father that she would rather have been loved by mankind than protected from it by her poisonous body. These parting words serve as a warning against trying to improve upon nature.

Giacomo Rappaccini – Giacomo Rappaccini is an old, accomplished medical scientist whose greatest work is a vibrant, exotic garden from whose plants he has made many powerful medicines. Rappaccini's **flowers** are no ordinary garden herbs but rather plants cultivated to be poisonous. The narrator remarks that Rappaccini's face looks highly intelligent but, even in its young years, did not evince much love of mankind. Baglioni points out that Rappaccini's great passion is science and that he would sacrifice anything, including human life, in pursuit of scientific knowledge. In fact, Rappaccini loves his daughter, Beatrice, so much that he put poison in her veins so that she can protect herself against anyone. Unfortunately, in making this decision, Rappaccini underestimated his daughter's desire for companionship. When he spots Giovanni visiting his daughter and sees that they get along, he makes a plan to poison Giovanni's body, as well—that way, his daughter will have a life partner. His plan backfires when Giovanni accuses Beatrice of poisoning him and rebukes her, breaking her heart. Beatrice drinks a potion designed to detoxify her body, but it winds up killing her. In losing his daughter, Rappaccini pays the price for meddling with nature.

Pietro Baglioni – Pietro Baglioni is a prominent physician of Padua, a university professor, and an old friend of Giovanni's father who chooses to take the young medical student under his wing. Baglioni is an older, stately, seemingly jovial man with one exception—he strongly dislikes his professional rival, Giacomo Rappaccini. When he discovers that Giovanni has taken an interest in Rappaccini's daughter, he warns the young man in strong terms to be on guard against foul play. Baglioni also resolves to himself that he will use his medical knowledge to protect the youth from wrongdoing. Hawthorne often depicts Baglioni as a nuisance to Giovanni, who would prefer to daydream about Beatrice instead of seeking Baglioni's advice. After making inquiries without Giovanni's permission, Baglioni uncovers that Beatrice is a poisonous woman. He says as much to Giovanni using a story about one such a woman who was gifted to Alexander the Great. Baglioni encourages Giovanni to confront Beatrice and find out whether he is correct—if so, he instructs Giovanni to administer an antidote that Baglioni has received from a colleague. Baglioni watches from Giovanni's window, and after Beatrice drinks the so-called antidote and dies, Baglioni rebukes Rappaccini (with a mixture of horror and triumph) for meddling with nature, suggesting that the death of his daughter is a just reward. All in all, Baglioni seems at first to be a man of reason with good intentions (to protect Giovanni), but his jealousy over a professional rivalry leads him to harm both Giovanni and Beatrice. This shows that even doctors—consummate men of reason—are sometimes irrational, and that the bad parts of a person's nature often outweigh the good.

Dame Lisabetta – Little is revealed about this old woman, beyond that she often can be found at Giovanni's lodgings and that she knows a lot about Paduan society. When the youth first arrives, she takes to him because he is handsome. When he asks whether the garden out the window belongs to their property or that of the neighbors, Lisabetta tells him it is Rappaccini's garden. She proceeds to share what little else she knows about the doctor. Days later, Lisabetta tries to catch Giovanni's attention. This proves difficult, since the young man seems to be oblivious to women unless they are young, good-looking, and named Beatrice. At last, Lisabetta succeeds in disclosing that there is a way to walk into Rappaccini's garden. In exchange for a gold coin, Lisabetta shows Giovanni how to access the garden. Lisabetta's presence in the novel highlights how shallow Giovanni is when it comes to appearances—he can

hardly perceive an older, unattractive woman.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SCIENCE, REASON, AND HUMANITY

Set during the Age of Enlightenment—a movement that glorified science and reason—"Rappaccini's Daughter" is the story of three scientists: the young medical student Giovanni, his family friend and fellow doctor Baglioni, and Baglioni's arch-rival, the "famous doctor" Rappaccini. Given that all three characters are doctors, one might think that their life's work would be to use scientific processes to heal others. However, as each of these men tries to impact and understand the world through science, each of them causes only destruction. Their collective failure to use reason to arrive at truth or virtue suggests the limitations of science as a way to understand the world and shows the terrible human cost of rationality.

Rappaccini is the story's most obvious embodiment of the danger of science and rationality. Described as a "true man of science," Rappaccini's life's work is to experiment on **plants**, which are said to produce "medicines that are as potent as a charm." However, Rappaccini's plant-based potions are also rumored to have sinister effects, and Rappaccini himself is said to have perverse motives. Baglioni tells Giovanni, for instance, that Rappaccini "cares infinitely more for science than for mankind" and that "He would sacrifice human life" to gain even the tiniest bit of scientific knowledge. Baglioni's comment not only paints Rappaccini as sinister, but it also implies that science can be harmful if it is not tempered by morality and human empathy.

As it turns out, Rappaccini's experiments *do* harm someone: his only daughter, the beautiful Beatrice who tends her father's garden. As the story progresses, Giovanni discovers that the plants are poisonous to everyone except Beatrice, whose body—by Rappaccini's design—contains the same poisons and is therefore immune. At the end of the story, Rappaccini reveals his belief that he has done a service to Beatrice by endowing her with "marvellous gifts," such as her ability to kill people and creatures with her poisonous breath. But Beatrice herself feels that her father has irreparably and unjustifiably condemned her. She tells him she would rather be "loved" than "feared" and that her death will cleanse her of the "evil" he has imbued in her. In other words, Rappaccini's own "patient" condemns his scientific experiments on her as being harmful and morally reprehensible.

Rappaccini's use of science for sinister ends is bad enough, but Hawthorne also shows that scientific pursuits lead the story's other two scientists—Baglioni and Giovanni—astray. Baglioni, for instance, treats science as a professional competition, rather than a way to serve others. While at first his desire to keep Giovanni away from Rappaccini seems fueled by his concern for the young man, Baglioni's professional rivalry with Rappaccini is actually his motivating force. When he first finds out that Giovanni is familiar with Rappaccini, for instance, he vows to protect Giovanni from coming "to any harm." However, he immediately adds that he's frustrated by the "insufferable impertinence" of Rappaccini trying to steal Baglioni's own protégé, Giovanni. Baglioni seems more upset by Rappaccini's supposed infringement on his own sphere of influence than by the potential harm Giovanni might suffer. Hawthorne again shows Baglioni's ulterior motives when he gives Giovanni an antidote that will allegedly cure Beatrice of her poisonous nature. Though this seems to be an attempt to help Beatrice and Giovanni, Baglioni later chuckles to himself that "We will thwart Rappaccini!" Baglioni's focus, then, is on ruining Rappaccini's experiment out of professional animus, not saving Beatrice. And, in fact, the antidote actually kills Beatrice instead of curing her. Whether or not this was Baglioni's intention, he doesn't seem to care that his "medicine" has killed a patient. Instead, after witnessing Beatrice's death from a hiding place, he calls out to taunt Rappaccini. Baglioni's behavior shows that science is not motivated wholly by reason—jealousy and revenge drive scientific pursuits as much as a quest for objective knowledge. Furthermore, this illustrates that science, when uncoupled from morality and compassion, can lead to harm.

While Giovanni is not as depraved as Rappaccini or Baglioni, science also leads him to immorality, as he uses reason to arrive at inaccurate and harmful conclusions about reality. For Giovanni, this revolves around his scrutiny of Beatrice. Despite his intuition that Beatrice is lovely and good, Giovanni has doubts about her nature after observing her deleterious effect on insects and flowers, and he worries that "those dreadful peculiarities in her physical nature" may correspond to a "monstrosity of soul." Giovanni ultimately decides, based on a pattern of living things dying in her presence, that Beatrice is evil. However, while his observations are correct (she *does* have this effect) and his inference is rational, he is wrong. Beatrice is not evil; she is an innocent victim of her father's experiment whose heart is pure. Science, then, has led Giovanni to the wrong conclusion, and this conclusion leads Giovanni to accuse Beatrice of being evil. This accusation wounds her deeply enough that she loses the will to live.

It's Beatrice who emerges as the story's most virtuous character, and it's significant that Hawthorne depicts her in explicit opposition to science. When Giovanni says that he has

heard she has deep scientific knowledge of medicinal plants, she scoffs, saying, "I know no more of them than their hues and perfume…Signor, do not believe these stories about my science." Furthermore, she questions the notion that anyone could arrive at truth through rationally deducing it with scientific observation: "If true to the outward senses," she says, "still it may be false in its essence"— in other words, she argues that scientific observations do not always reveal inner truth. Giovanni's belief in science, though, ultimately leads him to conclude that she is in fact *exactly* what she appears to be. This conclusion leads to the innocent Beatrice's death, which embodies the death of virtue and humanity in the face of pure reason.

GOOD, EVIL, AND MORALITY

In "Rappaccini's Daughter," Hawthorne presents the full spectrum of human morality: Rappaccini seems pure evil, Beatrice seems pure good, and Giovanni and Baglioni have conflicted intentions. As Giovanni, Baglioni, and Rappaccini all try to manipulate Beatrice to serve their own ends, it becomes clear that Beatrice's naïve goodness cannot prevail in a world whose morality is inferior to hers. She dies as a result of the other characters' immorality, showing that morality as pure as Beatrice's cannot exist in our corrupted world.

Hawthorne offers Beatrice as the story's example of good morality, an embodiment of pure goodness. This is immediately clear in Beatrice's name, which is an allusion to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which a woman named Beatrice guides the main character through the various realms of Heaven. Beatrice's good morals are further apparent in her appearance—in addition to being beautiful, she exudes "simplicity and sweetness" and "tenderness," she is like "the light of truth itself," and she is a "simple, natural, most affectionate and guileless creature." Her behavior supports these characterizations, as she is kind and tender when caring for the **plants**, she crosses herself whenever an insect dies in her presence (showing her concern for others, even vermin), and—most important—she takes scrupulous care to protect Giovanni from her own poisons and that of the plants, meaning that she denies herself physical contact with the man she loves for his own benefit. Beatrice's virtues are clearest in this selfless denial of what she most wants and her acceptance that one day she must allow Giovanni to move on from her.

By contrast, Beatrice's father Rappaccini is the story's embodiment of evil. From the first time he appears in the garden, the reader sees that something about him is not right—for one, he is "emaciated, sallow, and sickly-looking." Furthermore, unlike Beatrice's "expression of simplicity and sweetness," Rappaccini's face "could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart." Rappaccini's reputation aligns with his sinister physical presence. Baglioni paints him as a man who would "sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge." And, in fact, he does just that by sacrificing Beatrice's happiness to make her into one of his experiments, leaving her lonely and feared because her body is poisonous to others. Rappaccini seems to have no redeeming qualities; he is selfish, manipulative, arrogant, and inhumane.

While Beatrice and Rappaccini represent extremes of human morality, Giovanni and Baglioni are regular people: their actions and intentions are sometimes good and sometimes bad, and are most often they are an inextricable blend of the two. Giovanni, for example, is a young medical student who seems at first to be motivated by his desire to heal others and by his love for Beatrice. However, his ill-founded doubts as to her goodness lead him to falsely suspect her of betraying him, which makes him ultimately betray *her*, breaking her heart and leading to her death. Sometimes, Giovanni's actions reflect an earnest desire to trust Beatrice, such as when he begs Baglioni not to speak ill of Beatrice (saying that Baglioni cannot "estimate the wrong—the blasphemy, I may even say—that is offered to her character by a light or injurious word"). Despite this protectiveness, Giovanni succumbs to his own doubts and selfishness, accusing Beatrice to her face of being evil and "accursed," since he believes that she has made him poisonous ("as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself—a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity!"). His inability to trust in Beatrice's goodness leads him to a depraved and misguided tantrum that irrevocably harms her. As Beatrice dies, she says, "Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart—but they, too, will fall away as I ascend," suggesting that Giovanni has harmed Beatrice so profoundly that her only escape is to die.

Likewise, Baglioni's actions and motives are sometimes good and sometimes bad, but his net effect in the story is harmful. At first, he seems to be a kind older man. He is a friend of Giovanni's father (whose character has therefore been vouched for), and he takes Giovanni under his wing in a new city, feeding him dinner and warning him against his new neighbor Rappaccini's bad intentions and reputation. While Baglioni's motives here seem at first to be wholly protective, the narrator mentions casually that Giovanni might have taken Baglioni's warnings with "many grains of allowance" had he known that Baglioni and Rappacini were professional rivals. The troubling implication here is that Baglioni might be disparaging Rappaccini out of professional jealousy, not concern for Giovanni. As the story progresses, both of these motives seem simultaneously true: Baglioni has good intentions in his desire to protect Giovanni from Rappaccini (who proves a real threat, just as Baglioni warned), and he has bad intentions in that he wants to use Giovanni's proximity to Rappaccini to

foil Rappaccini's scientific success. This is clearest in the antidote that Baglioni gives to Giovanni for Beatrice. Baglioni seems to simultaneously want to return Beatrice to her natural state (thereby benefitting both Beatrice and Giovanni) and to want to ruin Rapapccini's experiment (as he says to himself after he gives Giovanni the potion). When Beatrice dies, Baglioni reacts with "triumph mixed with horror"—he has killed Beatrice but succeeded in ruining his rival's experiment. His final taunt to Rappaccini about his failed experiment (and dead daughter) suggests that perhaps Baglioni's bad nature has outweighed the good.

Throughout the story, all of the characters succumb to their bad intentions except for Beatrice, which results in her (as the story's only good character) dying. This seems almost inevitable when considering that Beatrice was not a creature of the broader world; her existence has always been "confined within the limits of that garden," and once she came into contact with the corruption of the broader world, that corruption killed her. Beatrice's death, coupled with Baglioni and Giovanni's succumbing to their worst natures, suggests that evil will prevail over good in this world.

LOVE, PASSION, AND DOUBT

In "Rappaccini's Daughter," reason and doubt lead characters astray while passion and intuition point towards truth. This is clearest in Giovanni's wavering over whether Beatrice is good or evil: his intuition tells him that she is good and his passion urges him to love her, while his rational mind is full of doubts—doubts that ultimately poison their relationship and lead to her death. Throughout the story, each character's relationship to love (be it earnest, doubtful, or cynical) is associated with their moral value, showing that pure, earnest love leads to happiness and genuine connection, while corrupted love leads to ruin.

Of everyone in the story, Rappaccini's love is the most corrupt and damaging. At first, he and his only daughter seem close—she is obedient and cheerful in his presence, and he seems to trust her implicitly, as he relies on her to care for what seems to be his most precious **plant**. This might suggest that the two have a mutually loving and respectful relationship, but as the story progresses it becomes more complicated. Rappaccini, as it turns out, has made Beatrice into a science experiment by infusing her with poison from his poisonous plants, which has two effects that benefit Rappaccini: it confines her to the garden (since she is toxic to the outside world), which makes her his assistant for life, and it means that she can care for the plants that have become too toxic for Rappaccini himself to tend. At the end of the story, however, Rappaccini claims that he altered Beatrice's nature out of love for her, saying that he has endowed her with "marvelous gifts," since she is no longer vulnerable to those who might hurt her. While this motive seems less nakedly selfish than the two above, it's also worth considering that these are "marvelous gifts" that Beatrice (who cries that she would rather have been "loved, not feared") doesn't want and which make her lonely and miserable. Therefore, regardless of whether Rappaccini's claim that he did this for her sake is sincere or disingenuous (meant to conceal his more explicitly selfish motives), his actions were *not* loving, since he did not consider who she is and what she herself would have wanted. Rappaccini's selfish and convenient definition of love thereby leads him to harm someone who has been faithful and loving to him.

In contrast, Beatrice's love is wholly pure—she believes that love means prioritizing others over herself. Regardless of what her father has done to her, she remains loving towards him and she happily assists in his projects. Furthermore, with Giovanni, Beatrice is kind and open, delighting in his presence and taking care to keep him safe from her own poisons and the poisons of the garden, even though this means denying herself physical contact with the person she loves. She is selfless, then—when he accuses her of poisoning him, she claims she wouldn't have done so for "a world of bliss." "I dreamed only to love thee, and be with thee a little time," she says, demonstrating that her love is not selfish or possessive, "and so to let thee pass away, leaving but thine image in mine heart." Furthermore, even after Giovanni has betrayed her and insulted her, she drinks the antidote before him, seemingly to spare him its effects if it is poisonous (which it turns out to be). Therefore, Beatrice's love is selfless and unflagging. In fact, once the two people she loves (her father and Giovanni) have betrayed her, she seems to prefer death to the possibility of living with a more cynical concept of love.

Giovanni's love is not so manipulative or selfish as Rappaccini's, but it is less pure than Beatrice's. From the moment he sees Beatrice, he seems genuinely taken with her, noticing her beauty and her good character equally, and obsessing over her in moments when they are not together. While his intuition and his passion tell him to trust and love Beatrice, his rational mind—which observes her deleterious effects on flowers and insects—causes him to doubt his love for her. Hawthorne writes that Giovanni's suspicions "dissolving in the pure light of her character, had no longer the efficacy of facts, but were acknowledged as mistaken fantasies, by whatever testimony of the senses they might appear to be substantiated. There is something truer and more real, than what we can see with the eyes, and touch with the finger." Hawthorne's writing here seems to implicitly suggest that Giovanni is foolish to cast aside his doubts in favor of his passion and intuition, but by the end of the story readers learn that Giovanni's love was a truer guide than his reason. Had Giovanni's love remained pure and undoubted, he and Beatrice might have been happy together, but his doubts and his vicious and accusatory outburst sour his love and ruin their lives.

All told, Hawthorne advocates following passion over reason

and prioritizing pure, selfless love. Rappaccini's love was destructive because it was manipulative and selfish, and Giovanni's love was destructive because it was poisoned by rational doubt—between the two of them, their misguided or manipulative love leads to the death of Beatrice, the story's purest character. Only Beatrice's love was ultimately worthwhile, but she found nobody equal to her on earth, and so she had to ascend to heaven where she might find purer love to match her own.

KNOWLEDGE AND SIN

Hawthorne twice compares Rappaccini's garden to Eden, calling to mind the Biblical story of man's fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. In that story, Adam and Eve live in a utopian garden and God's only rule for them is not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Unfortunately, they eat the fruit, and God makes them mortal and banishes them from Eden. Hawthorne's story parallels this Bible story, as Beatrice and Rappaccini tend a vibrant and isolated **garden**, and it is Rappaccini's thirst for knowledge that leads to his and Beatrice's downfall. Like the Biblical story, "Rappaccini's Daughter" warns readers of the dangers of ruthlessly pursuing knowledge, and it additionally warns about the foolishness of playing God by trying to interfere in the world's natural order.

Hawthorne explicitly sets up the parallel between Rappaccini's garden and the Garden of Eden from the very beginning of the story. As Giovanni sees Rappaccini tending his plants for the first time, he notices that Rappaccini moves among the plants with great caution, as though "walking among malignant influences, such as savage beasts, or deadly snakes, or evil spirits." Rappaccini's "air of insecurity" troubles Giovanni, because gardening is such an "innocent" pastime—especially since it was the occupation of the "unfallen parents of the race" (Adam and Eve). In this light, Giovanni asks himself with dread whether he is looking at the "Eden of the present world" and whether this sinister man Rappaccini, who seems to be growing poisonous plants, could possibly be Adam.

The obvious divergence between the Garden of Eden and Rappaccini's garden is that Rappaccini's garden is already corrupted—it is poisonous and sinister, whereas Eden was pure. However, despite that Rappaccini's garden is already corrupted, further danger still lurks within it: like in the Garden of Eden, Hawthorne suggests that Rappaccini's garden tempts people towards sinful pursuit of knowledge. With Eve, the serpent convinced her to pursue knowledge, but Rappaccini seems to have an inherent thirst to learn the secrets of nature: "He would sacrifice human life," Baglioni says, "his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard-seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge." This quote explicitly associates Rappaccini's quest for knowledge with evil and inhumanity, insinuating that his garden—a creation of scientific knowledge—is evil and harmful to mankind.

Rappaccini's quest for knowledge is inextricable from his desire to interfere in the natural order of the world. After all, his experiments involve creating hybrid plants not found in nature and testing their (sometimes helpful and sometimes toxic) effects on humans. Hawthorne explicitly condemns Rappaccini for the hubris of wanting to alter nature, and nowhere is this clearer than in his effect on Beatrice. As readers learn towards the end of the story, Rappaccini has interfered in Beatrice's nature by infusing her with poisons from his garden, making her something of a hybrid, scientifically-produced creature just like the plants themselves. While Rappaccini claims that he altered her nature out of love (giving her defenses against those who might harm her), his motivation was likely selfish: due to her poison, she can safely tend the plants that Rappaccini himself cannot touch, making her an essential accessory to gaining further scientific knowledge. By interfering with Beatrice in pursuit of knowledge, however, Rappaccini causes her great harm. Beatrice's poisonous nature isolates her from others, leaving her lonely and subject to the gossip and suspicions of others. Accusatorily, she tells her father she would rather be "loved, not feared." Rappaccini's condemnation of Beatrice indirectly leads to her death, which shows the tremendous cost of altering nature in pursuit of knowledge.

Overall, Hawthorne's parallel between Rappaccini's garden and the Garden of Eden is not simply suggesting that humans are sinful—that lesson is as old as time. What Hawthorne adds is that humans are *still* just as sinful as they ever were, and still making the same mistake of pursuing knowledge for its own sake and interfering with the world's natural order. When Giovanni sees the coat of arms belonging to a family whose ancestor Dante depicted suffering the "immortal agonies of his Inferno," it reminds readers that sin is ancient and its consequences are unimaginably severe. To avoid such punishment, Hawthorne suggests, one must be careful not to lose sight of humanity and morality when pursuing knowledge, and one must respect the natural order of the world, lest you bring harm to others by changing it.

GENDER

"Rappaccini's Daughter" depicts numerous differences between how men and women interact with the world around them. All the men (Giovanni, Baglioni, and Rappaccini) have professions, while the women (Beatrice and Lisabetta) manage their households. Men have formal educations, while women have knowledge that they have learned from going about their daily lives. Male characters get to move throughout the city, while the two female characters are only spotted at home. Sexism seems to underlie all of these social differences, and Hawthorne's story shows how men marginalize women, particularly in the way that all of

the story's men refuse to see Beatrice as a whole person. Instead of regarding women as individuals in their own right, male characters repeatedly reduce women to one trait or function, which leads to Beatrice's tragic death.

All of the story's male characters objectify Beatrice, turning her into a prop for their own lives. Rappaccini, for example, views his daughter as a science experiment. While she is his only daughter and his professional assistant who shares his passion for gardening, Rappaccini does not treat Beatrice as a person with desires and interests that are independent of his own plans for her. Without her consent, he infuses her body with poisons from his **plants**, which means that she can tend the more noxious plants without getting sick (thereby helping advance his experiments). However, this also means that she cannot be close to other people, because her body poisons them. While Beatrice abhors her condition (she would rather have been "loved, not feared"), Giovanni treats her like an object he can manipulate, rather than a person whose wishes he must respect.

Baglioni, likewise, thinks of Beatrice only as Rappaccini's accessory. While Baglioni admits that he has never met Beatrice, he relies on rumors to characterize her to Giovanni, saying that she is beautiful and that she has learned enough of Rappaccini's sinister science to be a professor herself. This might seem a complimentary description of Beatrice's beauty and accomplishment, but Baglioni means the description to be sinister—after all, women did not become professors then, so Baglioni is implying that something is amiss with her, just like something is wrong with her father. Furthermore, since Beatrice is the subject of one of her father's experiments, Baglioni realizes that by manipulating Beatrice's body (to try to rid her of poison), he can advance his own interests: he wants to ruin the experiments of his professional rival Rappaccini. Therefore, Baglioni comes up with an antidote for Beatrice, which he instructs Giovanni to give her without regard to whether it might be dangerous. This doctor's disregard for Beatrice's health leads to her death, which—perversely—is a success for Baglioni in terms of ruining Rappaccini's experiment. Here, too, Beatrice's life is merely a prop.

Giovanni's treatment of Beatrice is more complicated, as he is genuinely interested in who she is as a person, but he still never comes to understand her, even though she is straightforward about her nature. At times, Giovanni seems to see that Beatrice is a wonderful person who is too innocent and naïve to deceive anyone, but throughout most of the story, Giovanni struggles with doubt, wondering if she is secretly evil. These doubts are egged on by Baglioni's sexist depiction of Beatrice as a femme fatal, a weapon Rappaccini has constructed to ruin Giovanni's life. Ultimately, Giovanni disregards his personal experience with Beatrice and gives into his suspicions, viciously accusing her of evil and breaking her heart. The reader's clearest sense that Giovanni does not understand who Beatrice is comes immediately afterwards, when he hands her the vial thinking that she will drink it, be healed, and marry him. However, the narrator criticizes his wrongheaded idea of "an earthly union and earthly happiness…after such deep love had been so bitterly wronged." Giovanni does not understand that she could never be happy with him after he betrayed her—in this moment (as in the rest of the story), he is not considering her feelings, only his own interests.

Throughout the story, Hawthorne leads readers to expect that Beatrice is some kind of treacherous fallen woman who is going to ruin Giovanni's life through sexual allure. When it comes down to it, however, Beatrice is the only good character, and all the men have doomed her either by buying into the sexist idea that she must be secretly evil, or by manipulating her body as though she were a pawn in their own lives, rather than a human being worthy of respect in her own right. In other words, the story's narrative is consumed by Giovanni's obsession with whether or not Beatrice is going to hurt him, when in fact all three of the story's men fatally wound Beatrice (Giovanni emotionally, Rappaccini through the experiment, and Baglioni with the antidote). These men fret so much over how to characterize her (is she "angel or demon" "beautiful or terrible"), but ultimately nobody but Beatrice understands who she is.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GARDEN

Rappaccini's garden shows the reader that it is dangerous for humans to interfere with nature. Upon his arrival in Padua, Giovanni is told that his neighbor, Dr. Rappaccini, tends a garden filled with scientifically modified plants from which Rappaccini extracts poison to make medicine. Peering into the garden, Giovanni notes that it is like a grim, modern version of the Garden of Eden from the Bible. By comparing Rappaccini's poisonous plants with paradise, Giovanni highlights how much Rappaccini has distorted the natural order, making it impure as a result of his experiments. At the same time, the plants are vibrant, beautiful, and alluring. When Giovanni walks among the flowers, he observes, "The aspect of one and all of them dissatisfied him; their gorgeousness seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural." Even though they are beautiful, Giovanni is affronted by their strangeness. Throughout the story, Rappaccini's daughter, Beatrice, is compared with the flowers, from the sound of her voice to her scent. Both Beatrice and the flowers are beautiful yet deadly—they wound or kill anything with which they come into contact unless it is also poisonous. This dangerous power is a result of Rappaccini's meddling with the plant. Ultimately, his

interference proves disastrous. Beatrice becomes so fully poisoned that the potion she drinks to restore her health winds up killing her instead. Rappaccini's garden shows that, while interfering with nature can be enticing initially, such interference results in unforeseen, dangerous consequences.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Hawthorne's Short Stories* published in 2011.

Rappaccini's Daughter Quotes

It was strangely frightful to the young man's imagination to see this air of insecurity in a person cultivating a garden, that most simple and innocent of human toils, and which had been alike the joy and labor of the unfallen parents of the race. Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? And this man, with such a perception of harm in what his own hands caused to grow,—was he the Adam?

Related Characters: Giacomo Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 209

Explanation and Analysis

As Giovanni gazes into the garden next door, he sees Rappaccini for the first time and notices that he moves among the plants carefully and without touching or smelling them, as though they were malignant. Giovanni juxtaposes the decrepit, shady appearance of Rappaccini with his mental image of "unfallen parents of the race"—Adam and Eve, the Biblical first humans, who tended Eden before learning of sin and being expelled from the garden. Gardening is considered a nearly sacred activity because it was the job performed in Eden, and it has also been a means of subsistence for humans across time. However, Rappaccini appears to corrupt this activity because he is creating poisonous plants. Rappaccini's burning desire for knowledge has caused him to modify nature (God's creation), which parallels Adam and Eve's choice to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil instead of trusting that God's orders were good and just. In other words, just as Adam and Eve disastrously subverted God's natural order with their pursuit of knowledge, Rappaccini's scientific experiments have corrupted nature and might lead to horrific results.

Yes, my sister, my splendor, it shall be Beatrice's task to nurse and serve thee; and thou shalt reward her with thy kisses and perfumed breath, which to her is as the breath of life.

Related Characters: Beatrice Rappaccini (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

After Rappaccini asks his daughter to tend a plant that has become too poisonous for him to approach, she promises to love and care for it in exchange for the sweet aroma that the plant emits. Her tone of voice and the tender actions she anticipates (nursing and serving the plant) both indicate that Beatrice is a loving person. This passage also suggests that Beatrice has a special relationship with this plant, since its fragrance is "as the breath of life" for Beatrice. In other words, it sustains her. Later, when readers discover that the plant's poison runs through Beatrice's veins, they come to better understand why she uses the sisterly language in this passage. Not only do Beatrice and the plant share biological attributes (as sisters would), they are also companions, since Beatrice's poisonous body alienates her from others, leaving her incredibly lonely. However, her father cannot tell that he has wronged her because he does not understand the nature of her loving heart.

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.

Related Characters: Beatrice Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

Giovanni's mind swirls with emotional reactions after he sees Beatrice's presence kill an insect and a bouquet. On the one hand, Giovanni feels dread at the poisonous abilities of this woman (if in fact his eyes truly discerned that she can poison with her body). On the other hand, Giovanni hopes that this beautiful woman might fall in love with him. After all, they did exchange friendly banter. In this quotation, Giovanni cannot put his finger on the true cause of his two emotions. The narrator suggests that Giovanni would be in a better position if he only had one emotion, either dread or hope. The narrator further suggests that hybrid emotions are unnatural and even suggests that they are what create the fires in Hell—indeed, it's Giovanni's doubt (a mixture of his hope and dread) that leads him to his immoral betrayal of Beatrice at the end. This criticism of hybrid emotions parallels the concern in the story with Rappaccini's hybrid plants. Inappropriate mixtures interfere with the natural order.

❝ For some purpose or other, this man of science is making a study of you. I know that look of his! It is the same that coldly illuminates his face as he bends over a bird, a mouse, or a butterfly, which, in pursuance of some experiment, he has killed by the perfume of a flower; a look as deep as Nature itself, but without Nature's warmth of love. Signor Giovanni, I will stake my life upon it, you are the subject of one of Rappaccini's experiments!

Related Characters: Pietro Baglioni (speaker), Giacomo Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

When Rappaccini passes them in the street and stares at Giovanni strangely, Baglioni claims that Rappaccini's cold stare proves that the man has intentions to meddle in Giovanni's life as part of a science experiment. Baglioni's claims are suspicious because readers already know that the two doctors have a professional rivalry, and, furthermore, as a man of science, it seems too emotional and irrational for Baglioni to "stake his life" on his hypothesis about Rappacini's stare being correct. However, Rappaccini's stare is so unnatural as to concern readers, too. Baglioni points out that it is the look Rappaccini uses when he is dissecting a creature, and the look is "deep" but not warm, suggesting a clinical and inhumane curiosity. Ultimately, Baglioni is proved correct, as Rappaccini makes Beatrice and Giovanni poisonous.

❝ "I do so bid you, signor," she replied. "Forget whatever you may have fancied in regard to me. If true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence; but the words of Beatrice Rappaccini's lips are true from the depths of the heart outward. Those you may believe."

Related Characters: Beatrice Rappaccini (speaker), Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

After watching Beatrice kill an insect and a bouquet earlier, Giovanni asks her for permission to disregard anything bad he has seen so that he can base his opinion about her character on her words instead. In this quotation, Beatrice gives him permission to do so. She points out that sometimes people's senses observe something that does not tell the full story. Instead, she promises him that he can trust her words. She says that she speaks from the heart, suggesting that she is both virtuous and loving. Unfortunately, Giovanni will later forget or disregard this promise Beatrice makes. When he touches a bouquet and it wilts, Giovanni jumps to the conclusion that Beatrice has intentionally made his body poisonous. Giovanni refuses to trust Beatrice and instead reduces her to a wicked stereotype. As a result, he breaks her heart with cruel rebukes and destroys any chance they had at a happy life together.

> At such times he was startled at the horrible suspicions that rose, monster-like, out of the caverns of his heart and stared him in the face; his love grew thin and faint as the morning mist, his doubts alone had substance. But, when Beatrice's face brightened again after the momentary shadow, she was transformed at once from the mysterious, questionable being whom he had watched with so much awe and horror; she was now the beautiful and unsophisticated girl whom he felt that his spirit knew with a certainty beyond all other knowledge.

Related Characters: Beatrice Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

At this point, Giovanni is courting Beatrice, yet she does not permit him to touch her, and whenever he tries to, she becomes so somber that he stops trying. This passage explores Giovanni's inner thoughts on those occasions. Beatrice's sadness causes Giovanni to doubt her goodness, since he wonders what she has to hide. He wonders whether she has the ability to poison with her touch, which he has suspected since he saw her kill an insect. Not only does his trust diminish, but his love fades as well. Hawthorne compares it to a thin and faint mist, suggesting that his love is not something solid and reliable. Furthermore, the fact that Giovanni doesn't give Beatrice the benefit of the doubt—that she might be refusing to touch him because she doesn't want to, or because she is trying to protect him—and instead he settles on the most sinister explanations is important. This tendency to assume the worst is what ultimately makes him betray Beatrice, and Hawthorne suggests that this is part of the poison in Giovanni's nature, which Beatrice alludes to later when she, "Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?"

> "I have been reading an old classic author lately," said he, "and met with a story that strangely interested me. Possibly you may remember it. It is of an Indian prince, who sent a beautiful woman as a present to Alexander the Great. She was as lovely as the dawn and gorgeous as the sunset; but what especially distinguished her was a certain rich perfume in her breath—richer than a garden of Persian roses. Alexander, as was natural to a youthful conqueror, fell in love at first sight with this magnificent stranger; but a certain sage physician, happening to be present, discovered a terrible secret in regard to her."

Related Characters: Pietro Baglioni (speaker), Beatrice Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

After weeks of no contact, Baglioni pays Giovanni a surprise visit at home. He launches into a story about Alexander the Great, who allegedly received an Indian woman as a "gift" from a military rival. However, he goes on to say that a wise doctor discovered that the Indian woman had the ability to poison people with her touch. Baglioni believes that Rappaccini has made his daughter into a new version of the Indian woman.

Baglioni's anecdote reveals a lot about his way of thinking, as well as his character. First, it shows that he values reason. In Baglioni's time, the Greeks were thought of as the first civilization to study reason. His mention of Alexander is a nod to Greek traditions and values, including reason. In this case, however, reason winds up leading Baglioni astray—the conclusions he draws from the story result in harm instead of fixing any problems. Second, the implication here is that Baglioni regards both the Indian woman and Beatrice not as individuals in their own right, but rather as tools to be used in men's lives. The Indian woman is a weapon that a warrior is deploying against Alexander the Great, while Baglioni sees Beatrice not as a person with her own desires and personality (nor even as a woman Giovanni loves) but rather as an instrument of her father's, a science experiment he uses to advance himself professionally (thereby harming Baglioni, his rival). His inability to see Beatrice as an individual leads him to treat her as an instrument of his own advancement, giving her the antidote in order to "foil" Rappaccini's experiment—tragically, this leads to her death.

It is not yet too late for the rescue. Possibly we may even succeed in bringing back this miserable child within the limits of ordinary nature, from which her father's madness has estranged her.

Related Characters: Pietro Baglioni (speaker), Giacomo Rappaccini, Beatrice Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

After revealing that Beatrice is poisonous, Baglioni suggests that Giovanni administer an antidote to her condition. He seems to mean well with this suggestion: by using science and medicine, Baglioni hopes to undo Rappaccini's damage. However, just as it was arrogant for Rappaccini to interfere with nature, so too Baglioni oversteps his role by giving Beatrice a potion. By interfering with his daughter's nature, Rappaccini has done such deep damage that the potion cannot reverse it, and the antidote winds up acting as a deadly poison in her system. In this situation, medicine only does harm, and Baglioni's desire to use his scientific knowledge leads him to participate in the demise of an innocent woman. Even the way he suggests his plan is condescending to Beatrice—a woman of virtue and intelligence who is not just a victim for them to rescue. Later, Beatrice implies that the potion will kill her. The fact that she suspected the potion would kill her suggests that she understood more about her condition than did Baglioni and Giovanni. If they had consulted her instead of treating her like a damsel, tragedy could have been avoided.

It was now the customary hour of his daily interview with Beatrice. Before descending into the garden, Giovanni failed not to look at his figure in the mirror,—a vanity to be expected in a beautiful young man, yet, as displaying itself at that troubled and feverish moment, the token of a certain shallowness of feeling and insincerity of character. He did gaze, however, and said to himself that his features had never before possessed so rich a grace, nor his eyes such vivacity, nor his cheeks so warm a hue of superabundant life.

Related Characters: Beatrice Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 228

Explanation and Analysis

Just as he is leaving to confront Beatrice and prove whether she is poisonous, Giovanni stops to look at himself in the mirror. The narrator notes that, even though it is natural for a handsome young man to want to see his reflection, Giovanni's timing is bad. He is about to do something so important that stopping makes him seem shallow and of poor character. Throughout the story, Giovanni is characterized as a mostly good character, but his few imperfections lead him to unjustly accuse an innocent woman. This exchange leads the reader to expect that Giovanni is not pure goodness, but rather someone who is self-absorbed and a little foolish. In a few moments, Giovanni learns that he has become poisonous like Beatrice. Ironically, even though he himself is full of poison, his reflection shows that he has never looked healthier. In Giovanni's case, his infection and his health seem interconnected.

Incapable as he was of such high faith, still her presence had not utterly lost its magic. Giovanni's rage was quelled into an aspect of sullen insensibility. Beatrice, with a quick spiritual sense, immediately felt that there was a gulf of blackness between them which neither he nor she could pass.

Related Characters: Beatrice Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 229-230

Explanation and Analysis

Giovanni meets Beatrice in the garden to confront her about his poisonous body, but his anger calms once he sees her face to face. Even though his rational side has led him to suspect her of evil, the truth of Beatrice's innocence is something he can feel in her presence. Giovanni's confrontational approach reveals that his love is contingent on Beatrice's innocence. He needs to know the truth and feels comfortable taking matters into his own hands. If Giovanni would put away his need to *prove* that she is good and trust her instead, he would be morally better than he is. Yet he ultimately does not appreciate the truth of Beatrice's innocence, even though it radiates from her face. In this scene, Giovanni reduces her to one evil thing he suspects she has done. Nevertheless, Beatrice's spiritual perception in this scene is one indicator that she is more in tune with

the divine source of goodness and truth than Giovanni.

"Yes, poisonous thing!" repeated Giovanni, beside himself with passion. "Thou hast done it! Thou hast blasted me! Thou hast filled my veins with poison! Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself—a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity! Now, if our breath be happily as fatal to ourselves as to all others, let us join our lips in one kiss of unutterable hatred, and so die!"

Related Characters: Giovanni Guasconti (speaker), Beatrice Rappaccini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

These are the words Giovanni uses to wrongly accuse Beatrice of poisoning him. In reality, Beatrice did not intentionally harm Giovanni—it was her father up to his usual tricks. It is ironic that the words Giovanni uses to accuse Beatrice of poisoning him are in fact poisonous in their own right, since they are vitriolic, malicious, and they break Beatrice's heart. Until now, she thought Giovanni understood she was virtuous. However, his words reveal that he never fully trusted her or grasped her true nature. They also reveal that his love is not solid—it is subject to change into hate, even based on weak evidence. Giovanni is speaking to her as though she were a stereotype, a *femme fatale*—a woman who destroys the men who love her. But Beatrice is a real and virtuous woman, and hearing Giovanni accuse her in such strong words teaches Beatrice that she cannot trust him as her life partner. Later, she chooses death rather than a life with Giovanni because of this cruel speech.

Ought not, then the desert of humanity around them to press this insulated pair closer together? If they should be cruel to one another, who was there to be kind to them? 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? O, weak, and selfish, and unworthy spirit, that could dream of an earthly union and earthy happiness as possible, after such deep love had been so bitterly wronged as was Beatrice's love by Giovanni's blighting words! No, no; there could be no such hope. She must pass heavily, with that broken heart, across the borders of Time—she must bathe her hurts in some fount of paradise, and forget her grief in the light of immortality, and *there* be well.

Related Characters: Beatrice Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 232

Explanation and Analysis

After Giovanni discovers that Beatrice has been innocent the whole time, he considers building a life with her. After all, the two of them can touch only each other. Additionally, Giovanni reasons that it is still possible for them to heal, thanks to the antidote Baglioni supplied. He imagines getting married to Beatrice once the two of them are normal again. But the narrator observes that Giovanni is totally undeserving of Beatrice's love. When he verbally attacked her with false accusations, Giovanni proved that his love was not enduring. He was swayed into cruelty, but Beatrice could never be morally compromised—she is a better person than he is. As a result of his betrayal, the two could never be happily married. In this passage, Giovanni seems to relate to Beatrice as the idealized wife in his mind, while forgetting that he has just broken the real Beatrice's heart. The narrator concludes that Beatrice can only be happy again once she dies. After her time on earth is over, perhaps Heaven will heal her grief.

> As he drew near, the pale man of sciences seemed to gaze with a triumphant expression at the beautiful youth and maiden, as might an artist who should spend his life in achieving a picture or a group of statuary and finally be satisfied with his success. He paused; his bent form grew erect with conscious power; he spread out his hands over them in the attitude of a father imploring a blessing upon his children; but those were the same hands that had thrown poison into the stream of their lives. Giovanni trembled. Beatrice shuddered nervously, and pressed her hand upon her heart.

Related Characters: Beatrice Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti, Giacomo Rappaccini

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

Right before Beatrice drinks the potion, her father joins the couple in the garden. Rappaccini does not know they have been fighting. He stands over them proudly, as an artist would stand admiringly before his creation, presenting them to the world. In doing so, Rappaccini demonstrates the sin of pride. He arrogantly thought that his scientific expertise justified interfering with nature to create these mutant people. His actions came out of a desire to gain scientific knowledge, and he justifies interfering with Beatrice's life by positioning it as an attempt to protect his daughter from the outside world. Even if this justification is true, that almost makes his actions worse—it shows that he thinks love justifies doing harm to others, namely the people whom her touch would poison. His gesture is insulting to Giovanni and Beatrice alike, since it treats them like works of art, not human beings. This passage highlights Rappaccini's ignorance of his own negative impact, since he looks on proudly while the couple shrinks back from his hands in horror.

> "I would fain have been loved, not feared," murmured Beatrice, sinking down upon the ground. "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 flowers of Eden. Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead 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?"

Related Characters: Beatrice Rappaccini (speaker), Giacomo Rappaccini

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

When Rappaccini asks Beatrice if she would have preferred to be a defenseless woman instead of someone with poisonous touch, Beatrice responds that she would rather have been loved than feared by others. Instead, she was separated from other people and regarded as a monster, making her lonely and sad. Her own analysis of her life reveals how Rappaccini's science experiment actually caused her great harm, even though he is a doctor who is supposed to heal people. In addition, when she says good-bye to Giovanni, she asks a rhetorical question implying that his cruel words were more poisonous than her touch. Because neither her father nor her suitor appreciated Beatrice for the complex woman that she was, she chooses to pass on to Heaven instead of continuing life on earth with them. Her reference to Eden suggests that her soul will travel to a better garden, where her body is not inextricably linked to the poison that she contains due to her father's intervention. Unfortunately, the wicked acts of Baglioni, Rappaccini, and Giovanni (all of whom, ironically, are doctors) force the most noble character in the story out of their world.

> Just at that moment Professor Pietro Baglioni looked forth from the window, and called loudly, in a tone of triumph mixed with horror, to the thunder-stricken man of science,—"Rappaccini! Rappaccini! and is *this* the upshot of your experiment!"

Related Characters: Pietro Baglioni (speaker), Beatrice Rappaccini, Giacomo Rappaccini

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

Beatrice has just died. In a devastating display of bad taste, Baglioni uses this opportunity to rub Rappaccini's face in the mess he has created. Rappaccini interfered with nature in the name of science, and his daughter died in an attempt

to undo the damage. It reflects poorly on Baglioni that he would use this opportunity for revenge, since the tragedy of Beatrice's death is far greater than pain Rappaccini ever inflicted upon Baglioni. What's more, he objectifies Beatrice with his comment. Instead of engaging with her death as the end of a human life, he uses it for his own purposes. He interacts with Beatrice's life only as it is convenient for him, instead of letting her death be about her. Baglioni's comment is the last line of the short story. This is fitting, since it demonstrates arrogance, wickedness, and a preoccupation with science—all of which caused Beatrice's tragic death in the first place.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER

Long ago in Padua, young Giovanni Guasconti comes to study medicine at the local university. Because he doesn't have much money, he finds housing in a rundown building that once housed a great family of aristocrats. Giovanni recognizes the family's coat of arms hanging on the entrance and remembers that one individual from the family features in Dante's *Inferno* as a permanent resident of Hell. The homesick Giovanni sighs and looks around his humble abode.

This passage highlights medicine and morality as topics that will feature later in the story. Because Giovanni has come to study medicine, readers understand that he is interested in both science and healing. The allusion to Dante's Inferno also lets readers know that questions of right and wrong will likely be addressed, since the works of Dante explore morality and the afterlife. The previous residents' connection to hell also sets the tone that something dark and immoral may happen here.

Dame Lisabetta is an elderly resident of Giovanni's new home. Noticing that he finds the chamber gloomy, she encourages Giovanni to look out the window for sunshine—outside, he sees a **garden**. Giovanni asks Lisabetta if the garden belongs to their building, but she replies that it she is happy it does not belong to this house because of what grows there. The garden belongs to Giacomo Rappaccini, a famous doctor who blends plants to create "medicines as potent as a charm." She adds that Rappaccini's daughter can sometimes be seen tending the "strange flowers."

This is the first time readers learn about Rappaccini's garden, and immediately Dame Lisabetta regards it as abnormal and unappealing. She equates medicine with magic, calling the results of the garden "potent as a charm." This passage demonstrates that local residents are skeptical of the way this doctor is interfering with nature, even though the plants are ostensibly for healing and science.

Gazing down into the garden, Giovanni notes that the property appears to have been the "pleasure-place of an opulent family" long ago. Though its marble features have gone to ruin, a fountain still runs with fresh water. Giovanni senses that the fountain has an eternal spirit that keeps singing across generations. Around the pool grow plants that seem to need extra water. One shrub in particular sits in the middle of the pool and has extremely beautiful purple **flowers**. Another plant "wreathed itself round a statue of Vertumnus."

Giovanni observes that the garden seems simultaneously rundown and vibrant, with the new plants growing amid the wreckage of the old statues. The sense of timelessness, combined with the lush plants, conjures thoughts of the garden of Eden, a Biblical paradise from which Adam and Eve were expelled for the sin of knowledge. This is an ominous association, since Rappaccini—a scientist—is a professional seeker of knowledge.

As Giovanni gazes down, a "tall, emaciated, sallow, and sickly-looking man" emerges. This is Giacomo Rappaccini. He is "beyond the middle term of life," with "a face singularly marked with intellect and cultivation, but which could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart." He proceeds to scrutinize each plant, but he cautiously avoids touching or smelling them. Giovanni compares Rappaccini's gardening, the "most simple and innocent of human toils," with that of Adam in the garden of Eden. How strange, Giovanni thinks, that a man cultivating what appear to be **poisonous plants** should be the modern Adam.

Both Rappaccini and his garden are represented as corrupted versions of the natural order: Rappaccini is sickly and sinister, and while his garden appears healthy, something still seems amiss: why would he inspect the plants so closely while remaining careful not to touch or smell them? Giovanni quickly concludes that the plants are somehow malignant, and that the perversion of turning the innocent pastime of gardening into a dangerous and sinister project is not just disturbing in itself, but also in its implications for mankind (as Rappaccini is the new Adam, and Adam is the ancestor of modern man).

When Rappaccini reaches the purple **flowers** hanging beside the fountain, he puts on a mask. However, he still hesitates to move closer and he calls for Beatrice, his daughter. To Giovanni, she seems as if she could be "the human sister of those vegetable ones, as beautiful as they…but still to be touched only with a glove." Rappaccini informs her that this plant has become too poisonous for him, so she will have to care for it on her own henceforth. Beatrice embraces the plant, saying "my sister, my splendor," and she vows to serve it in exchange for "thy kisses and perfumed breath."

Two things stand out when readers first see Beatrice—her loving disposition and her similarity to the purple shrub. It is surprising that the plant, which seemed so poisonous to Rappaccini, would not harm Beatrice. This suggests that Beatrice has a unique relationship with poison. She is also uncommonly kind to the plant, calling it her "sister" and embracing it. Her father does not comment on her affectionate touches but instead gives her instructions he would give to a research assistant.

Giovanni continues to ruminate on the striking resemblance between Beatrice and the purple **flowers**, and that night, he dreams of the two being the same entity in different forms with "some strange peril in either shape." Waking, Giovanni thinks his imagination is distorting the matter, so he pulls back his curtains and gazes into the sunny garden, which looks "real and matter-of-fact." Neither Rappaccini nor Beatrice is in the garden, so he cannot verify whether they possess strange traits, but "he was inclined to take a most rational view of the whole matter."

Giovanni's dreams further reinforce a link between Beatrice and the hybrid plant. However, he resists jumping to conclusions because, especially as a scientist, he values being rational. Even though readers later discover an important link between the flower and Beatrice, Giovanni disregards his correct intuition in favor of his rational doubts.

That day, Giovanni visits Professor Pietro Baglioni, "an ancient friend" of Giovanni's father. The professor is "an elderly personage, apparently of genial nature, and habits that might almost be called jovial." At dinner, Giovanni inquires about Rappaccini, and Baglioni reacts gravely. He concedes that Rappaccini is Padua's most talented scientist "with perhaps one single exception" but he warns that Rappaccini "would sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a single grain" of knowledge. Baglioni further claims that Rappaccini uses the garden to distill poisons "more horribly deleterious than Nature."

Baglioni is characterized here as a well-intentioned man: he is "genial" and "jovial" and, besides, he is Giovanni's family friend, which means his character has been vouched for. Therefore, Baglioni's criticism of Rappaccini seems credible, and readers are inclined to take seriously his assertion that Rappaccini's obsession with science causes him to disrespect human life. This gives depth to the sinister appearance of the toxic plants, and it's also important that Baglioni is not suggesting that the plants make helpful medicine (as Dame Lisabetta did), but rather horrible poison. This undercuts the one possible defense of the garden, that it might save human lives.

The narrator notes that Baglioni and Rappaccini are professional rivals, and that Rappaccini is widely considered the superior party. When Giovanni mentions Beatrice, Baglioni teases that this must be why Giovanni was asking about the family. He says that Beatrice is rumored to be beautiful, yet she is rarely seen. He adds that she is said to know much of science—"she is already qualified to fill a professor's chair. Perchance her father destines her for mine!"

While Baglioni appeared wholly credible at first, the narrator subtly gives Baglioni an ulterior motive for his dislike of Rappaccini: professional rivalry and even jealousy. Notably, he even feels threatened by Beatrice, suggesting that she might someday take his job. It's worth remembering Baglioni's jealousy of Rappacini and Beatrice while evaluating the morality of his later actions.

Walking home from dinner tipsy, Giovanni buys a bouquet. At home, glancing down at the garden, Giovanni again sees Beatrice, who looks so radiant that shadows brighten around her. For the first time, he notices that her face has an "expression of simplicity and sweetness." Drawing near the **purple shrub**, she says, "Give me they breath, my sister…for I am faint with common air." She plucks a flower from it.

Beatrice is more beautiful and seemingly healthier than any other character in the story. Her demeanor also gives the sense of moral goodness—she brightens the shadows, which metaphorically evokes goodness casting out evil. However, her inability to live in "common air"—and the implication that she needs poisonous air to survive—seems to be at odds with her goodness, as needing poison to survive might indicate an evil and corrupt nature.

Just then, a lizard or chameleon crawls by Beatrice's feet as liquid drops from the **flower**'s stem. The creature "contort[s] itself violently" then dies. Beatrice "crosse[s] herself, sadly, but without surprise" and tucks the flower into her neckline. While Giovanni sits doubting what he just saw, an insect is attracted to Beatrice. As she looks at it "with childish delight," it falls down dead and she crosses herself again. Giovanni's handsome face draws Beatrice's gaze at last, and he throws his bouquet at her. She thanks him. As she departs, Giovanni thinks he sees the flowers fading in her hands.

This scene further confuses readers about Beatrice's nature. She shows her love for the reptile and insect alike, even though they are small, insignificant creatures, which suggests her kindness. However, this scene also seems to affirm Giovanni's hypothesis that Beatrice and the plant are poisonous. So it's not clear here whether Beatrice is good or evil, but her deleterious effect on the bouquet that Giovanni throws suggests that their burgeoning love is doomed.

In the following days, Giovanni avoids looking at the garden as though "something ugly and monstrous would have blasted his eyesight" there. The narrator remarks that this is foolish—he should either leave Padua immediately or "rigidly and systematically" accustom himself to the ordinary sight of Beatrice. Instead, he is leaving room for his "imagination to run "riot" and creates "a wild offspring of both love and horror."

Giovanni's avoidance of the garden seems at odds with his scientific rationalism: instead of trying to examine the garden to learn the truth, he seems not to want to see the evil he anticipates finding there. The narrator's remark that he needs to either fully see the garden or flee Padua further suggests that something sinister is happening and that Giovanni might be endangered by his fixation on Beatrice.

On a walk to clear his mind, Giovanni stumbles upon Baglioni. Giovanni is not eager to talk, afraid Baglioni will guess his secret, but the professor persists. As they converse, Rappaccini passes them and gazes at Giovanni carefully with "a look deep as Nature itself." Baglioni tells Giovanni to be on guard—that look suggests he is the subject of Rappaccini's latest experiment. The youth resists the advice, but Baglioni says to himself that he will protect Giovanni using "the arcana of medical science." Besides, Baglioni thinks to himself, it is "too insufferable an impertinence" for Rappaccini to "snatch the lad out of my own hands" for an experiment. In light of this, he hopes to "foil" Rappaccini.

Rappaccini looks at Giovanni in a way that suggests the young man is the subject of an experiment first and a human second, which seems to corroborate Baglioni's claim that Rappaccini disregards humanity in favor of science. Baglioni's vow to protect Giovanni seems, at first, goodhearted. However, Baglioni's motives become once again more complex, as his desire to protect Giovanni becomes inextricable from his desire to "foil" Rappaccini's experiment and his jealousy that Rappaccini might be influencing a young man who was supposed to be Baglioni's protégé.

Upon Giovanni's return home, old Lisabetta tries to attract his attention, smiling wildly but failing to catch his eye. She grabs him and announces that there is a secret entrance to Rappaccini's garden. He turns to her, surprised as though "an inanimate thing should start into feverish life." He pays her a gold piece to show him the way.

It's a little odd that Dame Lisabetta, an old woman who has presumably lived here for a long time, is only just now discovering an entrance to Rappaccini's garden, and it's also odd that—after saying she is glad that the sinister garden doesn't belong to their own house—she is encouraging Giovanni to visit the garden. This suggests some kind of interference, perhaps Rappaccini's.

After entering the garden, Giovanni resolves that seeing Beatrice is a matter of necessity—"It mattered not whether she were angel or demon; he was irrevocably within her sphere." He does not question whether this impulse is noble. Giovanni wanders the garden, examining the **flowers**. He only recognizes a few and knows these ones are poisonous.

Giovanni does not care whether his actions are moral or immoral because he is drawn into the garden by his love of Beatrice. It seems dangerous that he is unable to resist his impulse to see Beatrice, even as it brings him physically closer to the poisonous plants.

Beatrice emerges. Before Giovanni can make an excuse for why he is there, her smile puts him at ease. Giovanni asks if the rumors are true that she knows the science behind the garden's strange **flowers**, but Beatrice insists that she does not possess any advanced scientific knowledge, and nor does she want to. She encourages him to judge her by what he sees and not by rumors. Recalling the effects he has seen her have on living things, Giovanni begs that she instruct him to base judgments only on what she says, not on what he sees.

Whenever Beatrice is physically present, her kindness and good character shine through. It's notable, too, that Beatrice—who will eventually prove to be the story's most moral character—does not possess scientific knowledge and wishes not to be associated with science. This suggests an incompatibility between morality and science. Furthermore, Giovanni asking Beatrice for permission to trust her instead of trusting his senses demonstrates that he is open to the possibility that truth is not always something one can grasp via reason and direct observation. Sometimes, trust may be required.

As they continue talking, Giovanni intuits from her naivety that Beatrice has never left the garden. They talk and walk through the garden together until they pass the purple **flowers**. Giovanni reaches to pick one in exchange for the bouquet he threw to Beatrice, but she grabs his hand saying, "Touch it not!" His hand thrills at the touch, and she swiftly disappears. Giovanni notices that Rappaccini has been watching them.

That Beatrice has never left the garden strengthens the parallel between her and Eve, who had also never left the garden of Eden before she was expelled. This further suggests that Beatrice is morally good. Beatrice's warning not to touch the flower confirms that Rappaccini's interference with nature has resulted in dangerous plants. Rappaccini's analytical gaze gives the reader a sense of foreboding. He seems to be up to no good.

That night, Giovanni's fantasies of a poisonous woman fade away, replaced with thoughts of the virginal beauty whom he has just met. His wrist throbs and shows marks where Beatrice touched it, but soon he forgets the pain. The two begin to meet daily at an appointed hour.

The fact that Giovanni has pain where Beatrice touched him strengthens the reader's suspicion that Beatrice is poisonous, just like the purple shrub. However, after experiencing Beatrice's good character, Giovanni is less concerned about her physically poisonous qualities.

As their affections grow, they exchange glances and words of love but "no seal of lips, no clasp of hands, nor any slightest caress such as love claims and hallows." On occasions when Giovanni tries to touch Beatrice, she pulls away and becomes somber. In response, his feelings for her would "grow thin and faint as the morning mist," giving his doubts "substance" until she smiled again. Then he thought that "she was now the beautiful and unsophisticated girl whom he felt that his spirit knew with a certainty beyond all other knowledge."

Whenever Beatrice draws away from his touch, Giovanni interprets it as evidence of her sinister nature. However, Beatrice is presumably protecting Giovanni from harm, as she knows that she is poisonous, which would actually testify to her good character—she is prioritizing his wellbeing over her own desire for him. This shows that Giovanni is trying to use reason to assess the situation, but reason is leading him to the wrong conclusion (that Beatrice is evil), which suggests that science and reason do not always lead to truth.

Days later, Baglioni pays Giovanni a visit at his home, which irks Giovanni because he wishes to "tolerate no companions except upon condition of their perfect sympathy with his present state of feeling" about Beatrice. Baglioni tells a story about Alexander the Great, who received a beautiful Indian woman from a rival only to discover her breath was poisoned. Baglioni states that Rappaccini may have created a similar monster using science. Baglioni notices a **floral**, vaguely poisonous scent in the air, but Giovanni dismisses this. Baglioni hands Giovanni a vial, suggesting that Giovanni return Beatrice to normalcy by having her drink this antidote.

Baglioni's story about the Indian woman suggests that he thinks of Beatrice as her father's accessory: she is a tool or weapon that can be used against others, but she is not herself a person worthy of consideration. Therefore, the antidote that he gives Giovanni may be well-intentioned, but it may also be part of his attempt to foil Rappaccini's experiment, an intention he previously expressed. The poisonous floral scent in the air suggests for the first time that Giovanni has been corrupted by the garden.

Baglioni's visit revives Giovanni's doubts about Beatrice. Giovanni buys a **bouquet**, reasoning that if the flowers wilt in her hands, then she is surely evil. On his way to see her, Giovanni admires himself in a **mirror**—"a vanity to be expected in a beautiful young man, yet, as displaying itself at that troubled and feverish moment, the token of a certain shallowness of feeling and insincerity of character." Giovanni sees that he is more handsome than ever, but he also notices that the flowers he is holding have already wilted. To test whether he is poisonous, he breathes on a spider and it dies.

Giovanni buys the bouquet with the intention to do an experiment to discover Beatrice's true nature. Not only does this evince a lack of trust in her, it is also an example of science's flaws, as readers later learn that Beatrice is good natured, despite her effects on living things (so the experiment would have led Giovanni to the wrong conclusion). His impulse to admire himself in the mirror at this critical moment suggests he is self-centered, not selfless like Beatrice.

Despairing at his accursed state, Giovanni goes to meet Beatrice, "the only being whom my breath may not slay! Would that it might!" However, when he encounters her, Beatrice's angelic presence stuns him. Relying on her "quick spiritual sense," Beatrice asks what is the matter.

Giovanni is letting his reason lead him to believe that Beatrice is evil, even though she has never been anything but virtuous in his presence. Giovanni's limitations make it impossible for him to really understand who Beatrice is. Beatrice's empathy and intuition, by contrast, immediately let her know something is wrong with Giovanni, showing that she sees him for who he is, even if he cannot see her.

Giovanni asks where the **purple shrub** originated, and Beatrice says her father made it. "It was my sister, and I loved it with a human affection," she says, but she laments that its effect alienated her from society. Once she has acknowledged her condition, Giovanni lashes out, cursing her for making his body poisonous like hers. When she is puzzled by Giovanni's words, he says, "Dost thou pretend ignorance? …Behold! This power have I gained from the pure daughter of Rappaccini." He mocks her, treating her with "fiendish scorn." To prove his condition, he kills a swarm of insects with his breath.

Rappaccini's interference with nature harms Beatrice by isolating her from other people and making her lonely. Giovanni assumes that just because she is infected, she must be complicit in Rappaccini's experiment. This is not true, so Giovanni's cruelty towards her is unjustified. He lets his reasoning lead him to immoral behavior whose cruelty is even worse in light of the fact that Giovanni is Beatrice's only friend and she has always been kind and careful with him.

Beatrice protests that her father, not she, must have done this to Giovanni. With this, Giovanni's wrath subsides and he considers that perhaps since they are estranged from all other people, they should cling to each other. He also reserves hope that the antidote will restore them both to health. The narrator chides Giovanni's folly, thinking that all could be made well after his betrayal of Beatrice's pure and now broken heart. He offers her the vial, and she says, "I will drink; but do thou await the result."

Immediately after being horribly cruel to Beatrice, Giovanni thinks about himself—how he can secure the most happiness in the future—rather than considering Beatrice's pain. He can only see her as an instrument to his own happiness, rather than as a person who deserves happiness herself and may have been hurt. Nevertheless, Beatrice offers to risk drinking the antidote before Giovanni does so that his life will be safe even if the potion is dangerous. Unlike Giovanni, Beatrice demonstrates selfless love.

At this point, Rappaccini emerges and "seemed to gaze with a triumphant expression at the beautiful youth and maiden, as might an artist who should spend his life in achieving a picture or a group of statuary and finally be satisfied with his success." He explains that he planned to make the two "most dear to one another and dreadful to all besides!" Yet Beatrice considers her father's blessing a "miserable doom." Rappaccini retorts that it is a blessing to have defenses against evildoers, but Beatrice says that she "would fain have been loved, not feared."

Rappaccini objectifies both Giovanni and Beatrice, treating them as objects he can manipulate instead of as independent individuals. He explains that his intentions have always been loving (he made Beatrice poisonous to protect her from people, and he made Giovanni poisonous so she would have a companion), but by interfering with nature, Rappaccini has actually been cruel—Beatrice does not want these defenses because she values love more.

Beatrice vows to leave "the **flowers** of Eden," says goodbye to Giovanni, and asks him, "Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?" She drinks the antidote and dies. From Giovanni's window, Baglioni leans out and cries "loudly, in a tone of triumph mixed with horror…'Rappaccini! Rappaccini! And is *this* the upshot of your experiment!'"

Beatrice's last words to Giovanni suggest that he is morally corrupt. Ironically, he was so concerned about finding out whether Beatrice was evil that he did not stop himself from acting immorally. Furthermore, Baglioni's final reaction shows his own moral issues: instead of reflecting on his own role in Beatrice's death, he shames Rappaccini, his professional rival, for the harmful experiment. The fact that Baglioni reacts with horror shows that he has appropriate moral intuitions, but those are corrupted by his desire to see Rappaccini suffer.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Wickline, Veronica. "*Rappaccini's Daughter*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 29 Sep 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Wickline, Veronica. "*Rappaccini's Daughter*." LitCharts LLC, September 29, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/rappaccini-s-daughter.

To cite any of the quotes from *Rappaccini's Daughter* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. Rappaccini's Daughter. Vintage. 2011.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. Rappaccini's Daughter. New York: Vintage. 2011.