

## A SCIENTIFIC GREEDINESS IN HAWTHORNE'S 'RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER' (One Possible Interpretation of The Theme)

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### ABSTRACT

**Rappaccini's Daughter** is a story which was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1844. Its principal setting is a fantastic garden filled with lush vegetation and poisonous flowers, in the center of which is a broken fountain. This story is replete with symbols and symbolic allusions. However, like other literary works, the story has an "empty space".

This paper is intended to invite the readers to one of the possible interpretations of the theme of this particular work of Hawthorne to fill that "empty space". Man is superior to any other creatures. He has the capacity to learn and to develop himself. But, if "... he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind" and "if the head and heart are separated and the scientific functions alone, what price must the scientist pay?" The answer is the destruction to the life of mankind.

Key words: *intelligence, greediness, destruction*

### A. INTRODUCTION

"Rappaccini's Daughter" is a classic study of human nature that theme, setting, symbols and style conspire to make this story one of Hawthorne's warmest and most appealing. (Foerster; p.444). In *American Literature: Themes and Writers*, (1973: 1) G. Robert Carlsen, et. all say that " literature transmits the loves and hates, the hopes and fears, the ambitions and frustrations, the failures and triumphs, the problems and the experiences of man confronting life." Literature, therefore, records man's struggle to live and from it certain recurrent themes and ideas emerge.

In most cases the total work of a writer develops more than a single theme as Hartoko says in his *Pengantar Ilmu Sastra* (1989: 64), in a literary work there is a "space" that is intentionally left "empty" by the writer. He further says that this activates the readers and enables them to make interpretations of their own.

"If head and heart are separated, and the scientific function alone, what price must the scientist pay?" Man's capacity to learn is so great that his knowledge, if not wisely used, can threaten his fellow mankind. Man becomes a threat when he is mastered by his greediness. This is one of the questions that invites the readers to one of the possible interpretations of the theme of this particular work of Hawthorne to fill that "empty" space. *Rappaccini's Daughter* also talks about man's greed. Dr. Rappaccini and Prof. Baglioni, two of the four central characters of this story, are very intelligent but greedy. Their greediness even brings destructions to life.

## B. SUMMARY OF THE STORY

Beatrice is the daughter of a well-known doctor named Giacomo Rappaccini. Dr. Rappaccini has a beautiful garden with a broken fountain and a pool in the center of it, “ there was one shrub in particular, set in a marble vase in the midst of the pool, that bore a profusion of purple blossoms, each of which had the luster and richness of a gem; and the whole together made a show so resplendent that it seemed enough to illuminate the garden, even had there been no sunshine.” (445) When he works in the garden, Dr. Rappaccini always wears thick gloves because all the plants in the garden are poisonous. The plant with the most dangerous poison is the one which grows in a marble vase in the middle of the pool. The old doctor always covers his mouth and nostrils whenever he approaches this shrub. Unlike her father, Beatrice always touches the flowers intimately and tenderly and inhales their odor. She even gives a special treatment to this most dangerous shrub and calls it “sister.” “ 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.” (446) She bends toward that dangerous plant and opens her arms as if to embrace it. All those strange things are observed by Giovanni from his window. “ It is said that he ( Dr. Rappaccini) distils these plants into medicines that are potent as a charm”.

Giovanni asks Professor Pietro Baglioni about the strange doctor, his daughter and his garden when he gets the chance to have dinner with him. Prof. Baglioni, who is an old friend of Giovanni’s father, says that Dr. Rappaccini is doing a scientific experiment with his beautiful daughter and garden. He also says that the old doctor is a kind of man who cares more for science than for mankind and that his patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment.” He 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 great heap of his accumulated knowledge.” (447)

On his way back to his lodging, Giovanni buys a bouquet of flowers. And, on arriving at his lodging, he sees an amazing event from his window. Beatrice plucks one of the flowers of the most poisonous shrub. When she is about to fasten the flower in her bosom, a drop or two of moisture from the broken stem falls upon a lizard that happens to creep nearby. This small reptile dies soon afterwards. This is soon followed by another amazing event . The breath of the beautiful girl kills a beautiful insect which lies over her head. Giovanni gets more amazed to see that the bouquet of flowers he gives her also withers in her hands.

All those horrifying events make Giovanni upset. However, when his youthfulness meets with the beauty and gracefulness of Beatrice, he forgets them all and makes his first step into the dreadful garden. A little while later Beatrice appears and the young couple enjoy their first meeting.

Walking along the path, they come near the broken fountain. Beatrice holds Giovanni's hand quickly when the latter is about to pick the poisonous shrub.

Giovanni has a beautiful dream that night. But, when he wakes up, he finds his hand burnt and painful. This, however, does not prevent him from making another step into the garden. The sweet memory of his meeting with the beautiful Beatrice encourages him to make the second step into the garden. Soon the first meeting is followed by the second, the third, and so on and so forth.

One morning Professor Baglioni visits Giovanni and gives him an antidote. He says that both Giovanni and Beatrice should have a little sip of the liquid. And, it is this very antidote which ends the life of beautiful Beatrice.

### C. THE ANALYSIS

Hawthorne's *Rappaccini's Daughter* has four central characters. They are Beatrice, Dr. Giacomo Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti and Professor Pietro Baglioni.

#### **Beatrice**

Beatrice, the first character, is the daughter of Dr. Rappaccini. She is still young and beautiful. She leads a strange life. She is brought up in the garden of her father and cannot leave it. Her father is doing his experiment in this garden. He makes the flowers which grow there poisonous. Beatrice, who is brought up in the garden, is used to the poisonous flowers. She is even very intimate with the poisonous shrub. "I grew up and blossomed with the plant and was nourished with its breath. It was my sister, and I loved it with a human affection..." Beatrice even says "Give me thy breath, my sister, ... for I am faint with common air". Her statement tells us that it is impossible for her to leave the garden and lead a common life. She will die if she lives outside the walls of the garden. She is very pitiful girl. She becomes the victim of her own father's experiment.

To make the matter worse, Beatrice actually knows that she becomes the victim of her father's greed but she can do nothing. She says that what happens to her and to the garden is "the effect of my father's fatal love of science, which estranged me from all society of my kind". It is only a little while before she dies when she gets the chance – or may be the courage – to tell her father how she feels. Soon after she has sip of the antidote, her father appears and approaches her. Then Beatrice says to her father "wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?"

### **Dr. Giacomo Rappaccini**

Dr. Rappaccini, Beatrice's father, is actually the man who causes all those terrible things, he has never expressed much warmth of heart even in his youthful days. He is a well-known doctor and teaches in the Medical Department of the University of Padua. He is very greedy scientist who devotes all his life to science. About his greediness, Beatrice, his daughter, says "He is a man fearfully acquainted with the secrets of nature." While Prof. Pietro Baglioni, one of Dr. Rappaccini's friends, as well as his competitor in the University of Padua, says "...that he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment." His theory is "that all medicinal virtues are comprised within those substances which we term vegetable poisons." These are cultivated by Rappaccini with his own hands, and is said even "to have produced new varieties of poison, more horribly deleterious than Nature" (447). That is why he "creates" the dreadful garden. He is enslaved by his greed so that he has the heart to make his own daughter his subject of his experiment. "My father created it" answered she, with simplicity. "... and at the hour when I first drew breath, this plant sprang from the soil, the offspring of his science, of his intellect, while I was but his earthly child" (456) Rappaccini knows that it is impossible for Beatrice to leave the garden. He also knows that Beatrice, as a young girl, must be very lonely. Therefore, he tries to get her a companion. Giovanni Guasconti, who happens to live in the lodging next to the garden, is then made his victim, as Prof. Baglioni says "beyond a doubt you are selected as the material of some new experiment. Perhaps the result is to be death; perhaps a fate more awful still. Rappaccini, with what he calls the interest of science before his eyes, will hesitate at nothing" (454) Those are Baglioni's warnings that Rappaccini is a true man of science "as ever distilled his own heart in an alembic (distillation tool)".

### **Giovanni Guasconti**

Giovanni Guasconti is a handsome young man who studies in the University of Padua. He lives in a lodging whose window happens to overlook Dr. Rappaccini's garden. He falls in love with Beatrice. He knows about the danger which lies both in the garden and in Beatrice and that he may have to risk his life. Prof Baglioni has warned him. Unfortunately, Giovanni may not trust the professor and consider him as a man who is jealous and, therefore, tries to keep him away from Beatrice. This is, of course, possible because Prof. Baglioni considers Dr. Rappaccini as his rival. However, the terrible scene should be taken into account. As an educated young man he should be able to use his reasoning. He should know what will happen to him if he neglects those terrible scenes. But, what happens then shows us that passion and shallowness master this young man.

Giovanni receives the antidote after he has been to the garden several times. This shows that actually he can stay or even live in the garden with the charming girl he loves. His visits to the garden gradually make him immune to the poison. However, he tells Beatrice to drink the liquid

from the antidote, hoping that he will be able to take Beatrice out of the garden. Giovanni is also greedy and partakes in the murder of the poor girl. He also has to be responsible for Beatrice's death. If he is willing to stay in the garden with the girl, everything will be fine.

### **Professor Pietro Baglioni**

Like Dr. Rappaccini, Professor Baglioni also teaches in the University of Padua. He seems to be a good man who cares for Giovanni and warns him of the danger of the garden and that of Beatrice through his story of Indian fable. It said that the lovely woman in the story“ had been nourished with poisons from her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them that she her self had become the deadliest poison in existence. Poison was her element of life. With that rich perfume of her breath she blasted the very air. Her love would have been poison – her embrace death.’ (454) Prof Baglioni concludes that the old fable has become a truth by “ the deep and deadly science of Rappaccini and in the person of the lovely Beatrice”. This impression becomes greater when he finally equips Giovanni with the antidote, the powerful antidote was death and lets him fetch Beatrice. He is a man of false appearance. He is jealous and thinks that Dr. Rappaccini is his rival. Knowing that the doctor is doing an experiment with his garden, he then develops an experiment of his own. He wants to prove that he is better than Rappaccini. To gain his goal, he does not care about Beatrice’ (human) life. Just at the moment Professor Pietro Baglioni “looked forth from the window, and called loudly, in a tone of triumph... Rappaccini! Rappaccini! and is this the upshot of your experiment! “. Therefore, Baglioni is also a greedy man who, like Dr. Rappaccini, “ cares infinitely more for science than for mankind”.Intellectual pride and loss of human feeling have brought his heart hardened and turned to stone.

### **D. CONCLUSION**

Among the four central characters of Hawthorne's *Rappaccini's Daughter*, only Beatrice, who is made the title of the story, is innocent. Giovanni, Dr. Rappaccini and Professor Baglioni are all greedy. Giovanni is greedy because he is still young, his passion and his youthfulness cannot resist the beauty of Beatrice then the antidote ends her life. Dr. Rappaccini and Prof. Baglioni's greed is different. It is a scientific greediness, the scientific intellect functions alone, head and heart are separated and is, therefore, more dangerous. It can bring destruction to the life of mankind. A man should, ideally, maintain a balance between intellect and feeling.

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