

# **Rappaccini's Daughter Study Guide**

## **Rappaccini's Daughter by Nathaniel Hawthorne**

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# Plot Summary

Rappaccini's Daughter is a short story about a young student called Giovanni who falls in love with a girl called Beatrice. Unfortunately, the poison from her father Rappaccini's garden has contaminated her. One touch from Beatrice and Giovanni will die. While his friend Baglioni gives Giovanni the antidote to cure Beatrice to cure her, his motives are from innocent.

The story begins as Giovanni arrives at his lodgings in Padua. It is the first time that he has been to northern Italy - his family home is from the south - and his naivety is obvious from the start. When his landlady, Lisabetta, tells him to put his head out of the window to feel the northern sun, he does as she says, but is immediately disappointed. The sun nowhere near as hot as it is at home. Yet turning his head, he sees something that impresses him even more: a garden full of beautiful plants and flowers.

Lisabetta tells Giovanni the garden belongs to a scientist called Rappaccini - a man, she claims, known as far as Naples. Giovanni is impressed and waits at his window to catch a sight of the great man. It is not long before he arrives. Rappaccini is a dark, ill-looking, and cold-hearted figure. His only aspect that impresses Giovanni is the way that he studiously and very carefully looks at the flowers. He is obviously a man of great intellect. Giovanni is unprepared, however, for his daughter Beatrice. Walking into the garden like an angel, she is breath of fresh air and unlike her father, treats the flowers like her friends.

The next day Giovanni introduces himself to the family friend and university professor, Professor Baglioni. He knows Rappaccini personally and warns Giovanni, to stay away from him. Rappaccini has no interest in humankind. His interest is to create increasingly dangerous poisons from his plants. The plants, he claims, have contaminated his daughter and she cannot leave the garden. What Baglioni does not tell Giovanni is that Rappaccini is his rival. They hate each other.

Giovanni is in love with Beatrice and despite warnings, he buys her a bouquet of flowers. He can't go into the garden so he waits for at his window. Finally, she dances into view, smelling the flowers and approaching, with reverence, a purple plant next to a fountain. As she lifts the plant to smell its flowers, a dewdrop falls from a petal and onto the back of a passing lizard. The lizard immediately dies.

Giovanni can't stop thinking about Beatrice, wandering the Padua streets in a daze. One day he passes Baglioni without saying a word and the professor has to grab him to get his attention. As the same time, Rappaccini walks past them. He greets Baglioni with open contempt, but looks upon Giovanni with great interest. Baglioni is worried. Rappaccini, he tells Giovanni, maybe interested in him as a subject for one of his experiments.

On his return home, Lisabetta approaches Giovanni excitedly. She tells him she has found a secret entrance into Rappaccini's garden. After Baglioni's warning, he is



automatically mistrustful, but eventually his love for Beatrice overrides his suspicions and he follows his landlady to the garden.

At last, in Rappaccini's garden, Giovanni looks at the flowers with interest and to his delight, Beatrice comes into to view. She is ecstatic to see him. She receives few visitors and can't stop talking. Giovanni high on love and his beautiful surroundings walks to the purple flower that rises from the edge of a marble fountain in the center of the garden. Beatrice screams like a gunshot. Whatever he does, she screams, he should never touch the plants. She is immune to the plants' poisons, but if Giovanni touches one, he could easily die. Before he leaves Giovanni sees Rappaccini, looking on from the garden entrance.

After weeks of not seeing him, Baglioni visits Giovanni at his lodgings. Immediately he can see his friend is hopelessly in love. He warns him that Beatrice maybe leading him to a trap, but has to back off when Giovanni reacts badly to his negative words. Instead, Baglioni offers him a silver phial. inside the phial, there is a liquid that he says will cure Beatrice if she drinks it.

Before Giovanni goes away with the antidote to Beatrice, he looks into the mirror. He looks happier than ever. A spider is crawling over the mirror and he move forward for a closer look. When he is inches away, the spider drops dead. His breath has killed it. He is contaminated with the poison from the garden.

In the garden, Giovanni questions Beatrice of her motives. She is horrified. She claims that she is completely innocent and to prove herself she drinks the antidote from the silver phial. At the same time, her father enters the garden. He tells her she is no longer alone and to consummate her relationship with Giovanni, she should push one of the purple petals to his bosom. Beatrice, however, is dying. She asks her father why he has stopped her from being the woman she wanted and needed to be, but her father doesn't want to hear it. He berates her for choosing to be weak. As she dies, Baglioni's face appears at Giovanni's window with a mixture of horror and triumph.



# Pages 1-6

## Pages 1-6 Summary

Giovanni moves from the south of Italy to the northern city of Padua to study. He is a good student who states a deep understanding of Italian literature - in this opening section, he references Dante's *Inferno*. He also gives the impression of being naïve, and this is obviously the first time he has been away from home.

His landlady Lisabetta is the first person to make him aware of the beautiful garden underneath his window when she tells him to check out the sun - as good she claims as the sun in Southern Italy. While Giovanni immediately scoffs at her claim, he is taken aback at the sight of the gorgeous garden below. The central point is a marble fountain, which though cracked through the middle not only maintains its noble qualities, but gushes fresh water. Among the plants sprouting around its pool is a purple plant whose petals Giovanni compares to gems. Its flowers illuminate the rest of the garden.

Lisabetta tells Giovanni that the garden belongs to a scientist called Rappaccini - a man whose name is known as far as Naples. Sure enough the next day Giovanni sees Rappaccini enter the garden. If it were not for his studied countenance, he would look like a common gardener. Like the scientist and intellectual he obviously is, he not only studies each plant with great care, but with a coldness that Giovanni finds difficult to grasp.

Suddenly Rappaccini calls for his daughter Beatrice. She sets Giovanni aback. She is a beautiful, charming young lady with a strange mystery surrounding her. Unlike her father, she treats the flowers like friends - walking up to them, smiling, gently caressing their petals and taking in their scent.

The next day Giovanni introduces himself to his professor Pietro Baglioni. Baglioni is a friend of Giovanni's father so treats Giovanni cordially. When he mentions Rappaccini, he offers him some serious words of advice. He tells Giovanni that Rappaccini cares more about science than he cares about humans. While he is obsessively trying to find cures for illnesses he does not seem to care that he is creating more, even deadlier poisons in the process. His daughter he agrees is beautiful and every man in Padua would give her left leg to be with her, but Baglioni suspects she is just as bad as her father. Most likely, her father is training her to take care of his garden and work when he is gone. She could even be more brilliant than her dad.

## Pages 1-6 Analysis

The opening section introduces the young and naive Giovanni. He has just moved from the south, which, as the more traditional part of the country, immediately sets him apart and highlights his vulnerability in comparison to the more world-weary northerners. In



fact, the first sentence that Lisabetta, his landlady, speaks to him - "holy virgin" - is said with surprise that one can still meet pure innocence.

Giovanni has come to Padua find himself and a balance between his intellectual and passionate sides. In this regard Rappaccini and in some ways his professor represents his intellectual side. Beatrice represents his passionate side.

From the beginning however, the reader is aware he has given his intellectual side far more attention. The opening paragraph references the Dante poem *Inferno* and states that Giovanni is well-versed in one of the nation's best loved poets. When he sees Rappaccini working in his garden, though he can see he is cold-hearted, his intellect draws him in. Even when Baglioni is telling him that Rappaccini is a bad person, he states that surely his intelligence overrides any negative attributes he may have.

Nevertheless, Giovanni, in his youth, is open to change. He wants to experience beauty as shown by his awe at seeing the garden underneath his window. Immediately he goes to his landlady to express his wonder, suggesting not only how impressionable he is, but that he has a need to find his rather unevolved passionate side.

While the garden - with its fountain, ruined, yet still working, is representative of an ancient Garden of Eden - temporarily takes his attention from his studies, it is the beautiful Beatrice who draws him away. Carefree and sensual, she is the opposite of every other character in the book, and for Giovanni the opportunity to explore another side of himself.



# Pages 6-10

## Pages 6-10 Summary

Giovanni buys a bouquet of flowers, takes them back to his room and waits for Beatrice to enter the garden. He finally sees her approaching the purple, gem like flower near the fountain, gently caressing its flower in her hand and taking in its scent. As she does so, Giovanni observes a lizard crawling near her feet. A dewdrop falls from the flower and strikes the lizard on the head, instantly killing it. Minutes later, flies buzzing around Beatrice head also drop dead.

Finally, Giovanni throws the bouquet at Beatrice's feet. She is delighted and tells him she wishes she could return the favor by throwing up a petal from the purple plant, but she does not feel she could throw it that far. As she walks away, Giovanni thinks he sees the bouquet of flowers wilting in her grasp.

Giovanni is in love, walking down the streets of Padua in a daze. Even when he bumps into his professor Baglioni, and his father's friend, he ignores him and carries on. Baglioni has to run after him and force him to stop. He is angry Giovanni could ignore a friend of his father's in such a manner and demands to know what is happening. At the same time, Rappaccini passes them in the street, giving what only vaguely could pass as a salutation to Baglioni before wandering away. What Baglioni finds more interesting is how he perceived him to look at Giovanni. He tells Giovanni rather unfortunately for him, Rappaccini's is interested in him. That could mean that Rappaccini thinking of using him as a subject for one of his dangerous experiments.

Giovanni goes back to his lodgings wondering whether he should forget about the garden and Beatrice. Lisabetta welcomes him, back in and they way she looks at him, with a mixture of impatience and a secretive air, tells him she wants to talk to him. Finally, she tells Giovanni she has found a secret entrance in to Rappaccini's garden. Giovanni, heeding Baglioni's earlier warning, can't help thinking something is wrong - why would this woman suddenly find a secret entrance after all these years - yet the temptation of seeing the garden and Beatrice is too much. He follows Lisabetta to the secret entrance and leaves her to wander the garden on his own.

## Pages 6-10 Analysis

If Rappaccino's garden is the Garden of Eden then Beatrice is its forbidden fruit. The poisonous plants have contaminated her body and no one can touch her. Even her breath, contaminated with the scent of poisonous flowers, kills the flies buzzing around her head.

Under the same terms, Rappaccini is God. The garden is his creation and so is Beatrice and perhaps, though we never find out, Giovanni becomes his creation as well - two innocent people his garden is protecting from the evil world outside. What is missing at



his point is the influence of the devil, but this influence becomes more apparent at the end of the story. Here the author foreshadows it in the first two sections in the relationship between Baglioni and Rappaccini.

In the first section, the author suggests Baglioni warns Giovanni away from Rappaccini not to genuinely help, but because of his intense rivalry with Rappaccini. In this section, Rappaccini greets Baglioni with a cold and distant salutation.

There is an obvious distance between the two men that Giovanni does not notice, suggesting he is distancing himself from his intellect all together. In this section, the author states all he does now is wander the streets thinking about Beatrice. In this respect, Rappaccini is not seeing him as an experiment as Baglioni suggests, but as another person he hopes to protect from the world.

Giovanni is not so far gone that he misses the fact Lisabetta could be tricking him when she tells him about the entrance to the garden. But at this point Beatrice is too much of a temptation. Giovanni follows Lisabetta into the garden, crossing the line that divides the intellectual and passionate worlds.





# Pages 11-15

## Pages 11-15 Summary

After wandering the garden for a while, Giovanni finally meets Beatrice near the fountain. He asks her if she could show him around, and tell him about the plants. To his surprise, she says that she knows nothing about the garden. She is not a scientist; she just understands the plants on a subconscious level. Judging from Giovanni's choice of flowers in the bouquet he gave her; she suspects he knows more than she does. The two of them enter a delightful conversation about the beauty of the garden, the weather and the loneliness of their lives. It is clear Beatrice is enjoying Giovanni's company, but erupts when she sees Giovanni approach the purple flower.

Just before he picks one of the petals, she charges violently towards him, screaming for him to stop. Giovanni, surprised by her violent reaction, does as she says. As he turns to face her, he sees Rappaccino's watching them from the garden's entrance.

Giovanni starts to meet Beatrice everyday and everyday their relationship gets deeper. Giovanni can think of little else, including his studies, waiting impatiently for each meeting. His problem is that despite their feelings for each other, they can't touch each other - one touch from her could contaminate him with the plants' and her own poison. Instead, they have either delightful conversations about life or sad conversations about their situation. They love each other, but it seems impossible that they can ever be together.

Finally, worried for his friend, Baglioni visits Giovanni at his lodgings. He can immediately sense something is wrong and asks Giovanni what that strange perfume is emanating from his body. Giovanni is in no mood to take any questions about his relationship with Beatrice and tells him he must be imagining it. Baglioni states he is not one to imagine such things and continues into a story about a beautiful Indian woman sent as a present to Alexander the Great. Alexander fell deep in love with her, but to his horror found out poison was the element of her life. If he embraced her, he would die.

Baglioni continues to state that Beatrice has a similar hold over Giovanni. The perfume he claims he smells on his friend is a scent from the flowers in Rappaccini's garden. Most likely Beatrice has lured Giovanni to contaminate him with her the poison from the flowers. Giovanni is horrified that Baglioni could allude to Beatrice in any way other than pure. However, Baglioni has not yet finished, showing Giovanni a silver phial. Inside he says is the antidote that could cure Beatrice. If Giovanni feels that deeply about the girl and she feels the same way then she will drink the liquid.



## Pages 11-15 Analysis

In the garden Giovanni is transformed into a character ruled by his passions. His problem is he cannot express his passion physically- to touch Beatrice could mean death.

This is the first time the author directly alludes to his main theme - the need in one's life for balance. Rappaccini has gone so far in his obsessions for science and in the protection of his daughter, that though beautiful she is unreachable. Like the purple flower at the side of the marble fountain, she is too good to be true.

To her credit she aware of the imbalance of her life and does her best to protect Giovanni from entering too far into her world - desperately stopping him from touching the purple flower. Unfortunately, she cannot control Giovanni's feelings.

Giovanni love has made him vulnerable to manipulation and as we find later on, it is not Beatrice or Rappaccino manipulating him, but his professor Baglioni. Again, his manipulation echoes the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man. Like the devil promising Eve eating the apple will bring her closer to God, Baglioni promises Giovanni the liquid in the phial will cure Beatrice and bring them together.



## Pages 15 -20

### Pages 15 -20 Summary

With Baglioni gone, Giovanni starts to question Beatrice's motives. Perhaps Baglioni is right, perhaps she is trying to contaminate him. Perhaps she loves him. Either way he needs to find out the truth.

Giovanni looks into his mirror. Far from seeing someone contaminated with poison, he sees a happy, beautiful person smiling back at him. He turns to watch a spider crawling across his window and fascinated he walks closer to it. When he stands over the spider, it stops in its tracks. When he breathes on the spider, it drops to the floor, dead.

Giovanni walks through the garden with Beatrice. The atmosphere between them is unusually tense. Finally, Giovanni passionately tells Beatrice that he thinks she has tried to fool him, contaminating with the poisons of the garden. To prove he is right, he breathes on some flies - again they fall to the ground, dead.

Beatrice is aghast that he thinks she is capable of such hate. She insists he is wrong and her intentions towards him are honorable. She is sorry if she is hurt him, or contaminated him, but for so long she has been alone and she just wanted someone, Giovanni, to whisk her away. She says she will do anything to do be with him.

Giovanni pulls out of the silver phial and tells her it contains the antidotes for her condition. She does not need to be persuaded. Taking the phial, she downs the liquid.

Suddenly Rappaccini appear, looking upon his daughter like an artist admiring his masterpiece. He tells Beatrice she is no longer lonely, and if she pushes a petal to Giovanni's chest, they could live together in the garden forever. Beatrice, however, is growing weak from drinking the liquid. She tells her father all she wanted was have the vulnerability and sensitivity of a woman. She never wanted to be a scientific experiment. Rappaccinni laughs at what calls her weakness. He tells he had tried to show how to be strong, but has obviously failed.

As Beatrice dies, Baglioni appears at Giovanni's window with an expression between horror and triumph. "Rappaccini! Rappaccini!" he calls to his rival. "And is this the upshot of your experiment?"

### Pages 15 -20 Analysis

For the first time in the story, Giovanni trusts his intellectual side and questions Beatrice's intentions. It is too late. Not only has the poison already contaminated him - as evidenced by the death of the spider - but he has allowed Baglioni to use him to get back at his rival Rappaccini.



At least that's logical conclusion when Baglioni appears at Giovanni's window to watch Beatrice die. If he wasn't there to witness her death, it seems strange that he would have stayed in Giovanni's lodging so long after their meeting in the previous section. Baglioni knew the liquid would kill her and what amounts to his rival's life work. As the author states towards the end, Rappaccini looks upon his daughter as his masterpiece.

In the end, the story has little to do with Giovanni - the reader has no idea how he reacts to seeing his lover die at his feet. He is, like Beatrice, a pawn in a rivalry between two men who, despite their lofty ideas, care nothing of humanity.



# Characters

## Giovanni Guasconti

At the beginning of the story, Giovanni has moved from his home in southern Italy into lodgings in Padua in the north of Italy.

From the beginning, it is obvious he is an impressionable youth. The strange beauty of Rappaccini's garden below his bedroom window astonishes him. At the same time, he appreciates the way Rappaccini carefully and intelligently deals with his plants.

His life changes when he sees Beatrice. She takes him aback with her beauty and charm. Unlike her father, Giovanni notices that, rather treating the plants with care, she treats them like friends, going right up to them and smelling their scent. Baglioni, a professor at his university, and a friend of his father, the only connection he has with home, tries to warn Giovanni that Rappaccini grows poisonous plants - Giovanni himself could become part of his experiment. Giovanni, however, has fallen in love.

He initially tries to avoid Beatrice, but an image of her beauty and charm is always on her mind. When his landlady Lisabetta shows him a secret entrance into the garden Giovanni jumps at the chance.

Visiting the garden each day, a romance develops between Giovanni and Beatrice. Though Giovanni can't touch Beatrice or the plants, he eventually finds out the garden has contaminated him, and while it was always lurking in the background, his intelligence finally overpowers his feelings of love - he begins to question whether Beatrice has lured him to the garden in order to contaminate him.

It turns out she is innocent and they both fallen victim to the rivalry between Baglioni and Rappaccino. Giovanni pays the price for letting his instincts for love overpower his intellect.

## Beatrice Rappaccini

Her father, a scientist, has brought her up among poisonous plants and though she has become immune to them, she will contaminate anyone that she touches. It is unfortunate then that naturally, she is a charming and playful young woman. As soon as she sees Giovanni intruding into her garden, she goes out of her way to make friends with him.

There are suspicions throughout that she may not be the person she claims she is to Giovanni. Baglioni for example, claims her father is bringing her up to become a great scientist, perhaps greater than himself. But turns out not to be true.



Apart from regarding the plants as friends, she knows nothing about how they grow. She is an innocent victim in her father's quest for scientific perfection, and there is little to suggest that he sees her anything more than a guinea pig.

When she dies at the end, her father taunts her for preferring the condition of a weak woman. To Beatrice that is all she ever wanted to be.

## **Giacomo Rappaccini**

Rappaccini is a scientist so obsessed with finding cures for disease that he has created a garden full of poisonous plants and contaminated his daughter Beatrice.

The author leaves the reader in no doubt that he is a bad person. When Giovanni first sees him working in the garden, he recognizes him as intelligent but also as a cold person who has rarely experienced happiness. We see little of him for the rest of the story, but his character constantly casts a shadow over the story.

Baglioni is the first man to confirm to Giovanni that Rappaccini, although a genius, is a very bad person who cares nothing for humanity. He goes as far as warning Giovanni that Rappaccini could want him as a subject for one of his experiments. Though he believes his friend, Giovanni is too taken with Rappaccini's daughter to stay away.

It's through Giovanni's relationship with Beatrice that the reader finds out more about Rappaccini. He has kept his daughter captive in his garden seemingly as an experiment and not out of love. When she dies at the end, Rappaccino berates her for wanting to be what he calls a weak woman.

## **Pietro Baglioni**

Baglioni is a friend of Giovanni's father who works as a science professor at Padua University. He warns Giovanni that Rappaccino could be luring him into a trap, but the author suggests that he is not doing this through the kindness of his heart. He has a big rivalry with the scientist that slowly unravels itself as the story continues.

Baglioni gives Giovanni the so-called antidote to cure Beatrice, but the antidote kills her. Whether he knew the poison would kill her or not, the end of the story betrays him as someone happy to have revenged his enemy. Sticking his head out of Giovanni's window, and with a mixture of horror and triumph on his face, he screams, "This is the upshot of your experiment."

## **Lisabetta**

Lisabetta is Giovanni's landlady, but there seems to be more to her than just that. She knows an a lot about Rappaccino and his garden including its secret entrance. At one

point Giovanni thinks she could be in conspiracy with Rappaccini, but the reader never finds out whether that it is true or not.



# Objects/Places

## Padua

Giovanni moves to Padua in northern Italy from southern Italy.

## Rappaccinni's Garden

Rappaccinni's garden is full of poisonous but beautiful plants. The centerpiece of garden is an old cracked marble fountain with a purple flower growing next it. The author compares the plants petals to gems that illuminate the whole garden.

## Giovanni's Lodgings.

Giovanni lodges with Lisabetta. His bedroom, where he spends most of his time, overlooks Rappaccinni's garden.

## The Bouquet

Giovanni throws Beatrice a bouquet from his bedroom window. It is so full of beautiful flowers and color combinations that Beatrice presumes he knows something about plants.

## The Fountain

Though the marble fountain in the center of Rappaccinni's is cracked down the middle, water still flows from it. Giovanni thinks it has a noble quality.

## The Purple Flower

A beautiful purple flower grows near the marble fountain. Its purple petals have the richness of gems, illuminating the whole garden. Beatrice regards the plant as a kind of friend, at one point regretting that she had forgotten to give it her usual attention.

## The Lizard

The lizard dies when dew from the purple flower drips onto its body.





## **The Spider**

Giovanni kills a spider when he breathes upon on it, signalling that the garden has contaminated him.

## **The Silver Phial**

Baglioni gives Giovanni a silver phial with that he claims will act as a antidote for Beatrice. When she drinks it, however, she dies.

## **Univesity.**

Giovanni visits the university to introduce himself to his father's friend Professor Pietro Baglioni.



# Themes

## Achieving a Balance in One's Life

The story states a huge emphasis on achieving balance in one's life. When Giovanni first arrives in Padua, though naive, he has obviously spent a lot of his time concentrating on his intellectual side and not enough time on his more romantic passionate side. Consequently, the garden and the beautiful Beatrice fascinate him, seeing them as a vehicle he can discover that underdeveloped side of himself.

In comparison, the other characters have concentrated on one side of their personality for so long and developed it so fully, there seems no chance they could ever find any balance in their lives. Baglioni and Rappaccini have become obsessed with science and intellect. Rappaccini's garden and his quest to find cures has become so important to him, he has forgotten that his initial aim was to help humankind. The only thing he has achieved is infecting his daughter Beatrice with the garden's poisons.

Beatrice represents the passionate side of life. Unlike her father, she treats the garden and its flowers as a friend and something she can cherish. Like her father however, she has developed only one side of herself and finds it difficult, if not impossible, to think logically.

From this perspective, her imbalance proves the downfall of both herself and Giovanni. In her need to escape the garden and fulfill her romantic ideals with Giovanni, she downs the liquid without ever questioning what it could be. In terms of Giovanni, though she knows the garden will contaminate him with its poisons, and though she does want him to be contaminated, she allows him to continue meeting her in the garden. In the end, the garden also infects him with its poisons.

Giovanni is not blameless since he takes the silver phial from Baglioni with the same lack of thought that Beatrice drinks it - but he is the one character capable of achieving balance. He not only has the ability to question, as he questions both Lisabetta and Beatrice's motives, but also the ability to feel great passion.

Unfortunately, by the end of the story, he finds himself in a kind of stasis. Though contaminated with the garden's poisons, the death of his lover has stripped him of the only thing that could allow him to enjoy this condition - his innocence. Although this has imbued him with the realism and cynicism of an intellectual, he may never get the chance to express this side of himself.

Giovanni's chance for happiness has been destroyed by the imbalance of the others.



## The Destruction Caused by Rivalry

Though the reader does not find out until the end, the story's focus is on the rivalry between Rappaccini and Baglioni. The rivalry destroys everything in its path.

Rappaccini has already destroyed his daughter's life by contaminating her from the poisons of his garden - his life's work. Yet Baglioni to get back at him and to prove that his methods are wrong, destroys the life of his friend's son Giovanni.

There is no suggestion in the story they destroy the lives of Beatrice and Giovanni out of spite. Rather they focus so much on proving the other wrong and establishing their own academic point of view, they have forgotten how to treat people - they see Beatrice and Giovanni merely as pawns in their game.

On a larger scale, the rivalry represents the rivalry between countries. The people in power begin an argument that on a basic level could be merely personal, yet develops into something that, from an outsider's point of view, looks important.

In the story, the author states near the beginning that had Giovanni known about the rivalry between the two men he would not have taken Baglioni's words so seriously. As it is, he takes them very seriously, resulting in his own downfall.

Again, on a larger scale, the words of a government can lead men into war. Often it is only during and after the war that they realize they have been lead into almost certain death, and for reasons they find hard to phantom. Similarly, Giovanni must feel awful as he hears Baglioni finally expressing his true motives while watching Beatrice die at his feet.

## The Preservation of Innocence

The story comments on society's obsession with innocence and keeping people in a state of innocence. From the beginning, Lisabetta celebrates the arrival of an innocent young Giovanni by stating "Holy Virgin, signor." She is genuinely happy to have a young man in the house, telling him if he finds her house too gloomy, he can stick his head out of the window to feel the sun.

When Giovanni puts his head out of the window, he sees Rappaccini's garden, which is a representation of innocence. Like the innocence in life however, the innocence of the garden is over-protected. In this case by poison. Similarly, Beatrice, her character an extension of the garden, is untouchable to people from the outside. She will always have her innocence.

From this point of view, it is interesting that the garden is the only setting that the author describes in any detail. The reader can guess that Giovanni meets Baglioni, for example, at university, but the author never actually states the setting - the reader only knows that it is somewhere other than Giovanni's lodgings. By describing only the



garden, the author creates the feeling it is the world and not the garden that is contaminated. The garden is only trying to protect itself.

The author represents the outside world and its lack of innocence through the characters of Baglioni and Rappaccini. In particular, the author describes Rappaccini as dark and coldhearted.

Yet by the time Giovanni watches Beatrice die at his feet, the reader understands that Rappaccino's coldness came from the disappointment of life.

Trying to maintain people's innocence for too long can set them up for huge disappointment and in the end create bitterness that they will stay with them for the rest of their life.



# Style

## Point of View

The author tells the story from the third person, but mostly from the point of view of the main character Giovanni. Every scene includes him and he is the character the reader gets to understand on an intimate level.

Yet, by the end of the story, the reader can see author's focus on him has worked to lead the reader astray. The central story is not about Giovanni's innocence and him finding himself, as it is easy to believe, but the rivalry between the two professors: Baglioni and Rappaccini.

Slowly through the story, they have manipulated Giovanni in attempt to get what they want. The reader can see that by the way Giovanni thinks - his mind dancing away on romantic notions - that they did not have hard task. In this respect, Baglioni is the winner as the reader can tell not only by the fact he speaks the last words of the story, but also that he is looking triumphantly out of the window while the story has finished from his point of view and the author has discarded of Giovanni's feelings as if they meant nothing in the first place. The reader does not even get to hear Giovanni how feels watching Beatrice die.

In this regard, the story is partly a fight between the characters to establish their own individual point of view. Unfortunately, for Giovanni and Beatrice they are too young and innocent for their point of view to have any real strength. Rappaccini has a stronger point of view and his few appearances often looking upon the scene like some God or as the author alludes to at the end of the story, as an artist admiring his masterpiece. It is Baglioni, the man with the most cynical point of view, who ultimately proves victorious.

## Setting

The garden is the major setting in the story and the only setting the author describes in any detail. There is little description of Giovanni's lodgings and when he goes out to meet Baglioni for the first time, we can presume he is meeting him at the university, but the author does not say. Even when they go to dinner, the reader has no idea where they go. It seems the only setting that has any significance is Rappaccini's garden.

Yet, it is also the only setting not suitable for humans. If anyone touches any of its beautiful plants, they could die or at least the plants will contaminate them with their poisons and they will have to stay within the garden's walls.

Unfortunately, it is also the only the setting in the story with any lure, and particularly for a young, impressionable character like Giovanni. The purple flower impresses Giovanni so much, thinking of it as a gem that illuminates the rest of the garden, that despite that he has seen its dew kill a lizard, he tries to touch its flowers.



In fact, while he is in the garden Giovanni seems to give himself completely to its splendor. This partly has something to do with his feelings for Beatrice and partly has something to do with the strange aura of life and hope the garden seems to represent. For example, although its fountain situated in its center is cracked and crumbling, it still flows with water - despite everything it has a found way to survive.

In this respect, the garden contaminating a human with its poisons, or perhaps in this case its life, is it not represented as wholly bad. The rest of the world is so dull, and unforgiving, that the author can't even be bothered to describe it. At the very least, the garden is a place young people such as Beatrice and Giovanni can keep their innocence.

## Language and Meaning

The language the author uses in the story changes depending on the setting and the characters within the scene. The author describes anything to do with the garden with color, life and romance. For example, the author describes the garden's fountain as an "immortal spirit that sung its song unceasingly"; and the purple flower is "so resplendent that it seemed enough to illuminate the garden, even had there been no sunshine." Though the reader later hears the garden is full of poisonous plants, the author gives the impression that the garden itself is innocent. As he says of the plants: "all have their individual virtues."

Humans and not the garden have made it unsuitable for others humans. In this respect, the author describes Rappaccini, the creator of the garden in dark oppressive tones. In comparison to the garden's splendor, Rappaccini is "an emaciated, sallow, and sickly looking man, dressed in a scholar's garb of black."

Both descriptions highlight one of the story's main themes of the divide between the intellectual life and the passionate life. As the reader can see from the description of Rappaccini, the author represents intellectual life as dull, dangerous, and oppressive. The university that the reader can only presume Giovanni visits to meet Professor Baglioni, isn't even described. Neither is the place they visit later on for dinner. Instead, the author subjects the reader to deliberate and pretentious dialogue between the two men. When Giovanni is with Baglioni, he "muses" on what his friend says, usually talking in slow and short sentences.

In comparison, his conversations with Beatrice are breathless and seamless, often getting away from the point. The author warns the reader this could be the case from the beginning. Unlike her father, the author describes Beatrice as "she looked redundant with life, health, and energy; all of which attributes were bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled tensely, in their luxuriance, by her virgin zone." When Giovanni speaks to Beatrice, he asks things "abruptly" and repeats things he says, almost as if he wants her to feel his unbridled passion.

## Structure

In general, Rappaccini's daughter has a typical structure of a short story. The author introduces all the characters and their main characters in the first few pages. Immediately the reader knows that Giovanni is an impressionable young youth, living away from home whose landlady Lisabetta is slightly creepy. The garden, the main setting, and in its own way a character, is introduced in the third paragraph. The author introduces Rappaccini on the following page, followed quickly by Beatrice, and then finally Giovanni's professor Baglioni.

Yet despite its conventional appearance, the structure acts as a red herring. The central part of the story is not about Giovanni, but the rivalry between Baglioni and Rappaccini - that is what gives the story its meaning. The author uses the structure to show this by putting the two professors in the background, pulling the strings like two puppet masters. For example, the author occasionally shows Rappaccini, standing in the shadows, looking upon the meetings between Giovanni and Beatrice - Giovanni does not officially meet him until the end of the story. Baglioni tells Giovanni not to do most of what he does.

The reader can guess towards the end of the story that Baglioni is trying to get back at Rappaccini when he says to himself on the stairs, "We will thwart Rappaccino yet." By this point, the two professors have become a bigger part of the story. Baglioni for example has given Rappaccini the silver phial that will eventually kill Beatrice. By the end, when the two professors confess their true motives, Beatrice is dead and Giovanni is not only contaminated with poison, but rendered a minor character.



## Quotes

"Reminiscences and associations, together with the tendency to heart-break natural to a young man for the first time out of his native sphere, caused Giovanni to sigh heavily, as he looked around the desolate and ill-furnished apartment" (p. 1).

"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 lustre and the 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" (p. 2).

"She looked redundant with life, health, and energy; all of which attributes were bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled tensely, in their luxuriance, by her virgin zone" (p. 3).

"As Beatrice came down the garden-path, it was observable that she handled and inhaled the odor of several of the plants, which her father has most sedulously avoided" (p. 3).

"It is his theory, that all medicinal virtues are comprised within those substances which we term vegetable poisons. These he cultivates with his own hands, and is said even to have produced new varieties of poison, more horribly deleterious than nature" (p. 5).

"The youth might have taken Baglioni's opinions with many grains of allowance, had he known that there was a professional warfare of long continuance between him and Doctor Rappaccini" (p. 5).

"A drop of two from the stem of the broken flower descended upon the lizard's head. For an instant, the reptile contorted itself violently, and then lay motionless in the sunshine" (p. 6).

"His face was all overspread with a most sickly and sallow hue, but yet so pervaded with an expression of piercing and active intellect, that an observer might easily have overlooked the merely physical attributes, and have seen only this wonderful energy" (p. 8).

"I will stake my life on it, you are the subject of one of Rappaccini's experiments" (p. 8).

"Listen, Signor! There is a private entrance into the garden" (p. 9).

"The tinge of passion that has colored Beatrice's manner vanished; she became gay,





and appeared to derive a pure delight from her communion with the youth, not unlike what the maiden of a lonely island might have felt, conversing with a voyager from the civilized world" (p. 11).

"For the first time in my life,' murmured she, addressing the shrub, 'I had forgotten thee!" (p. 12).

"A childish fable,' answered Giovanni, nervously starting from his chair. 'I marvel how your worship finds time to read such nonsense, among your graver studies'" (p. 12).

"Bestow the vase, and the precious liquid within it, on your Beatrice, and hopefully await the result" (p. 15).

"Giovanni sent forth a breath, deeper, longer, and imbued with a venomous feeling out of his heart; he knew not whether he were wicked or only desperate. The spider made a convulsive gripe with his limbs, and hung dead across the window" (p. 15).

"Let us pray! Let us to church and sip our fingers in the holy water at the portal! They that come after us will perish as by a pestilence. Let us sign crosses in the air!" (p. 18).

"Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil, and capable of none?" (p. 20).

"I would fain have been loved, not feared" (p. 20).

"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'" (p. 20).



## Topics for Discussion

How does Baglioni and Rappaccini rivalry destroy Beatrice and Giovanni's innocence?

What elements of the story come from the biblical story the Fall of Man?

How and why does the language of the story change during the exchanges between Beatrice and Giovanni?

What does the story state about people who don't find a balance between their emotional and intellectual lives?

Why doesn't the author show Giovanni's reaction to Beatrice's death at the end of the story?

Why is it so important for Rappaccino to preserve his daughter's innocence?

How does Baglioni gradually manipulate Giovanni to do what he needs to get back at his rival?