



Reading Literature:

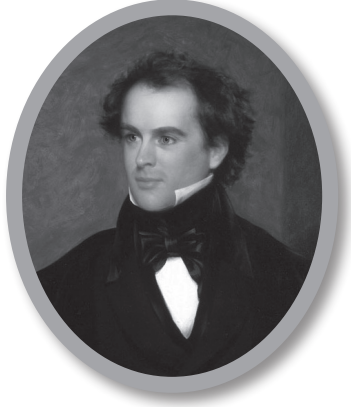
Fiction, Poetry, and Exercises
Based on the Common Core
State Standards

Level 12

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Nathaniel Hawthorne

Rappaccini's Daughter



INTRODUCTION

Rappaccini's Daughter

“Rappaccini’s Daughter” first appeared in the December 1844 edition of the *United States Democratic Review*, a well-respected publication that featured political essays and promoted the development of American literature. Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper, Walt Whitman, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Henry David Thoreau contributed stories, poems, and articles.

The story contains all of the features most associated with Hawthorne:

Moral Ambiguity

- Beatrice is undoubtedly poisonous and the potential vehicle of Giovanni’s destruction, but this evil is no fault of hers. She is innocent.
- Giovanni is an innocent, a stranger in the city. He is young and naïve, but the narrator makes it clear that Giovanni’s attraction to Beatrice, powerful as it is, is not love.
- Rappaccini is evil, the scientist who values science above humanity. He sacrifices his daughter’s happiness for the sake of knowledge. Even Baglioni praises him for his knowledge. Toward the end of the story, Baglioni claims he is a “wonderful man.”

Religious and Psychological Symbolism

- Rappaccini’s garden is compared to the Garden of Eden twice.
- Rappaccini’s daughter is named Beatrice—the “blessed one,” Dante’s beloved, and a guide in the last book of his *Divine Comedy*.
- Beatrice is the object of Giovanni’s physical desires, but they both recognize that she is poison to him; both know that to surrender to their physical impulses would mean his death. The narrator insists that Giovanni *desires* but does not love Beatrice.

An Overarching Allegorical Structure

In his satiric and self-deprecating introduction to this “translation” of M. de l’Aubépine’s *Beatrice; ou la Belle Empoisonneuse*, Hawthorne notes that the [fictional] French writer’s work and reputation suffered from his “inveterate love of allegory, which is apt to invest his plots and characters with the aspect of scenery and people in the clouds, and to steal away the human warmth out of his conceptions.”

The allegory in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” is made apparent by Hawthorne’s obvious allusions to Judeo-Christian scripture, classical Italian Renaissance poetry, and the use of archetypal settings and characters.

Prolixity: tending toward excessive and tedious wordiness

The works listed, which are attributed to Aubépine, are actually titles of some of Hawthorne's own books, translated into French.

Fain: willingly

Edifice: a building

Hawthorne frequently uses litotes to achieve a specific effect, just as Melville does.

that M. de l'Aubépine's productions, if the reader chance to take them in precisely the proper point of view, may amuse a leisure hour as well as those of a brighter man; if otherwise, they can hardly fail to look excessively like nonsense.

Our author is voluminous; he continues to write and publish with as much praiseworthy and indefatigable **prolixity** as if his efforts were crowned with the brilliant success that so justly attends those of Eugene Sue. His first appearance was by a collection of stories in a long series of volumes entitled "*Contes deux fois racontées*." The titles of some of his more recent works (we quote from memory) are as follows: "*Le Voyage Céleste à Chemin de Fer*," 3 tom., 1838; "*Le nouveau Père Adam et la nouvelle Mère Eve*," 2 tom., 1839; "*Roderic; ou le Serpent à l'estomac*," 2 tom., 1840; "*Le Culte du Feu*," a folio volume of ponderous research into the religion and ritual of the old Persian Ghebers, published in 1841; "*La Soirée du Château en Espagne*," 1 tom., 8vo, 1842; and "*L'Artiste du Beau; ou le Papillon Mécanique*," 5 tom., 4to, 1843. Our somewhat wearisome perusal of this startling catalogue of volumes has left behind it a certain personal affection and sympathy, though by no means admiration, for M. de l'Aubépine; and we would **fain** do the little in our power towards introducing him favorably to the American public. The ensuing tale is a translation of his "*Beatrice; ou la Belle Empoisonneuse*," recently published in "*La Revue Anti-Aristocratique*." This journal, edited by the Comte de Bearhaven, has for some years past led the defence of liberal principles and popular rights with a faithfulness and ability worthy of all praise.

A YOUNG MAN, named Giovanni Guasconti, came, very long ago, from the more southern region of Italy, to pursue his studies at the University of Padua. Giovanni, who had but a scanty supply of gold ducats in his pocket, took lodgings in a high and gloomy chamber of an old **edifice**, which looked not unworthy to have been the palace of a

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.

105 “At least,” thought he, “her poison has not yet **insinuated** itself into my system. I am no flower to perish in her grasp!”

With that thought, he turned his eyes on the bouquet, which he had never once laid aside from his hand. A thrill of indefinable horror shot through his frame, on perceiving that those dewy flowers were already beginning to droop; they wore the aspect of things that had been fresh and lovely, yesterday. Giovanni grew white as marble, and stood motionless before the mirror, staring at his own reflection there, as at the likeness of something frightful. He remembered Baglioni's remark about the fragrance that seemed to pervade the chamber. It must have been the poison in his breath! Then he shuddered—shuddered at himself! Recovering from his stupor, he began to watch, with curious eye, a spider that was busily at work, hanging its web from the antique cornice of the apartment, crossing and re-crossing the artful system of interwoven lines, as vigorous and active a spider as ever dangled from an old ceiling. Giovanni bent towards the insect, and emitted a deep, long breath. The spider suddenly ceased its toil; the web vibrated with a tremor originating in the body of the small artizan. Again 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.

“Accursed! Accursed!” muttered Giovanni, addressing himself. “Hast thou grown so poisonous, that this deadly insect perishes by thy breath?”

Vivacity: liveliness, energy

Insinuated: introduced into; instilled or infused



QUESTIONS

1. What purposes does Hawthorne achieve by prefacing his story with the introduction about M. de l'Aubépine? How does this preface affect the tone and meaning of the story?
2. What evidence does Hawthorne provide to suggest that Baglioni's criticisms of Rappaccini are just? What evidence does Hawthorne provide to suggest that they are not?
3. On the surface, this story seems to portray typical character types and relationships: Giovanni and Beatrice as the naïve, innocent youths; Rappaccini as the villain; and Baglioni as the trusted mentor. What evidence does Hawthorne provide to suggest that this is *not* the arrangement on which the story is operating? What is Hawthorne's true evaluation of his characters?
4. Since its first appearance in print, this story has puzzled critics, who have interpreted it as supporting Transcendentalism or anti-Transcendentalism. It also has both a pro- and an anti-science bias. Provide quotations and direct references to the text that could be offered to support the validity of any two themes.

It is important to the point Crane hopes to illustrate that the Swede singles out the gambler "by chance."

Patronage: a stated but false equality with a person who is regarded as inferior

"Ssh!" said the barkeeper.

"Say," snarled the Swede, "don't you try to shut me up. I won't have it. I'm a gentleman, and I want people to drink with me. And I want 'em to drink with me now. *Now*—do you understand?" He rapped the bar with his knuckles.

25 Years of experience had calloused the bartender. He merely grew sulky. "I hear you," he answered.

"Well," cried the Swede, "listen hard then. See those men over there? Well, they're going to drink with me, and don't you forget it. Now you watch."

"Hi!" yelled the barkeeper, "this won't do!"

"Why won't it?" demanded the Swede. He stalked over to the table, and by chance laid his hand upon the shoulder of the gambler. "How about this?" he asked, wrathfully. "I asked you to drink with me."

The gambler simply twisted his head and spoke over his shoulder. "My friend, I don't know you."

30 "Oh, hell!" answered the Swede, "come and have a drink."

"Now, my boy," advised the gambler, kindly, "take your hand off my shoulder and go 'way and mind your own business." He was a little, slim man, and it seemed strange to hear him use this tone of heroic **patronage** to the burly Swede. The other men at the table said nothing.

"What! You won't drink with me, you little dude? I'll make you then! I'll make you!" The Swede had grasped the gambler frenziedly at the throat, and was dragging him from his chair. The other men sprang up. The barkeeper dashed around the corner of his bar. There was a great tumult, and then was seen a long blade in the hand of the gambler. It shot forward, and a human body, this citadel of virtue, wisdom, power, was pierced as easily as if it had been a melon. The Swede fell with a cry of supreme astonishment.

The prominent merchants and the district attorney must have at once tumbled out of the place backward. The bartender found himself hanging

3. For the most part, personal names of characters, when they are provided at all, are seemingly less important than phrases that identify characters. What does Crane achieve by identifying some of his characters as “the Easterner,” “the cowboy,” “the Swede,” “the gambler,” “women,” etc., rather than giving each a name and a unique backstory and personality? What are the likely reasons that Crane would choose to portray character types rather than distinct characters?
4. Consider the following phrases from the story, especially the italicized portions. What purposes does Crane achieve by combining unexpected elements in his metaphors, similes, personifications, etc., and juxtaposing disparate images in his descriptions?
- “The cowboy and the Easterner *burnished themselves fiery-red* with this water...” (earlier described as “the coldest water in the world”);
 - “...the two little windows presented views of a *turmoiling sea* of snow”;
 - “The *huge arms of the wind* were making attempts...to embrace the flakes as they sped”;
 - “He now hurled a *strange mass of language* at the head of his son”;
 - “Once when [the Swede] jabbed out *harpoon-fashion* with his fork to pinion a biscuit...”;
 - “For a moment their glances *crossed like blades*...”;
 - “...the latter looked steadily over it into the *blazing orbs* of his accuser”;
 - “...the cowboy’s jaw had dropped in that *expression of bovine amazement*...”;
 - “...the room was still *lighted with the anger of men*...”;
 - “The men lowered their heads and plunged into the *tempest as into a sea*”;
 - “...clouds of flakes, swept up from the ground by the frantic winds, were streaming southward *with the speed of bullets*”;
 - “...a *holocaust of warlike desire* caught the cowboy...”;
 - “To the Easterner there was a *monotony of unchangeable fighting* that was an abomination”;
 - “...here, with *the bugles of the tempest* pealing, it was hard to imagine a peopled earth.”



INTRODUCTION

The Blind Man

D. H. Lawrence's "The Blind Man" first appeared in the July 1920 issue of *English Review*, a well-respected literary magazine published in London. The story's first United States publication was in the August 7, 1920 issue of *Littell's Living Age*, a Boston-based weekly literary magazine.

Since its first appearance, it has been interpreted as a dark romance, a pseudo-gothic tale, a psychological examination of what we now call Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and an exploration of Lawrence's fascination with what he called "the blood consciousness," which he considered to be the very source of what makes a person human. It has been praised as the brilliant work of a genius and also reviled as the debauched ravings of a depraved lunatic.

Lawrence's skill as a thinker and writer, however, were rarely questioned. The power of his work was acknowledged, even while it was condemned. "The Blind Man" reveals power—if not clear meaning—in its interplay of light and dark, sight and blindness, and intimacy and superficiality.

some fatal flaw, he could not be by himself, he had to depend on the support of another. And this very dependence enraged him. He hated Bertie Reid, and at the same time he knew the hatred was nonsense, he knew it was the outcome of his own weakness.

He went downstairs. Isabel was alone in the dining-room. She watched him enter, head erect, his feet tentative. He looked so strong-blooded and healthy, and, at the same time, cancelled. Cancelled—that was the word that flew across her mind. Perhaps it was his scars suggested it.

“You heard Bertie come, Maurice?” she said.

“Yes—isn’t he here?”

- 105 “He’s in his room. He looks very thin and worn.”
“I suppose he works himself to death.”

A woman came in with a tray—and after a few minutes Bertie came down. He was a little dark man, with a very big forehead, thin, wispy hair, and sad, large eyes. His expression was inordinately sad—almost funny. He had odd, short legs.

Isabel watched him hesitate under the door, and glance nervously at her husband. Pervin heard him and turned.

“Here you are, now,” said Isabel. “Come, let us eat.”

Bertie went across to Maurice.

- 110 “How are you, Pervin,” he said, as he advanced.
The blind man stuck his hand out into space, and Bertie took it.

“Very fit. Glad you’ve come,” said Maurice.

Isabel glanced at them, and glanced away, as if she could not bear to see them.

“Come,” she said. “Come to table. Aren’t you both awfully hungry? I am, tremendously.”

- 115 “I’m afraid you waited for me,” said Bertie, as they sat down.

Maurice had a curious monolithic way of sitting in a chair, erect and distant. Isabel’s heart always beat when she caught sight of him thus.

“No,” she replied to Bertie. “We’re very little later than usual. We’re having a sort of high tea, not dinner. Do you mind? It gives us such a nice long evening, uninterrupted.”

The term “high tea” denotes the time of day—an evening rather than an afternoon meal—and was used primarily by the working class as the name of their evening meal. A typical meal would include a hot dish like a meat pie, bread with butter, cheese, and possibly a vegetable. The way Isabel wonders whether Bertie would mind suggests the difference in social class and upbringing between Maurice, the farmer, and Bertie, the educated barrister.