

The Desire for Knowledge

By Angela Huerta

Can the thirst for knowledge jeopardize the relationship between a loving creator and his creations? In Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter," and Genesis 2-3, the relationship between the creators and their created beings change due to the created beings' desire for knowledge. This change is due to the instigators of the stories: Professor Baglioni in "Rappaccini's Daughter" and the serpent in Genesis 2-3. These instigators are able to manipulate Beatrice and Giovanni's curiosity as well as Adam and Eve's curiosity. This then causes the creations to dig for a deeper meaning of their existence and end up altering their relationship with their creators. They end up going against their creators' wishes and instead of having the trusting relationship they had before, their relationship has weakened.

Due to there being no such thing as a perfect individual, people tend to wonder why they exist or whether or not there's more to the knowledge that they already know. This is why it was so easy for Professor Baglioni and the serpent to trick the created beings into going against their creator's wishes. Professor Baglioni was able to accomplish this by opening Giovanni and Beatrice's eyes to the truth. That truth was that Beatrice was just another one of her father's experiments and Giovanni was turning into an experiment as well. This causes the relationship between Beatrice and Rappaccini to turn into an untrusting one and she takes her life.

As for the serpent, he also uses Adam and Eve's desire for knowledge against them by tricking Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. This then leads to Adam eating the fruit as well. Both of their eyes were open to the truth God knew and they didn't. The truth being that they wouldn't die at that moment from eating the fruit. They would also find out that they were naked and be

able to distinguish between the good and bad things in the world. At first Adam and Eve believed everything God said and had no cause to doubt him. The temptation, however, to know exactly what God knew changes that trusting relationship into a bad one. God ends up banishing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

In "Rappaccini's Daughter," all Beatrice wants to know was why she was isolated from the rest of the world. The little hope that an antidote would get rid of the poison in her system makes her want to go against her father's wishes. Little did she know it would end her life. The temptation with Adam and Eve was that they wanted to be like God. They were able to do anything they wanted and the only rule God had was to not eat from the tree of knowledge. They were afraid of dying if they did but with the little push from the serpent, their desire took over their rationality and they ate from the tree. They didn't have any intention of being punished afterwards and altering their relationship with God altogether.

It wasn't that Rappaccini and God wanted to intentionally change their relationship between themselves and their creations. Although Rappaccini was literally a mad scientist and treated Beatrice as one of his experiments he also wanted what he thought was best for Beatrice. This is shown by what he says to his Beatrice right before she's about to drink the antidote: "Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil, and capable of none?" (Hawthorne 28). He thought he was protecting her from the outside world and making her superhuman so no one could harm her.

As for God, He wanted Adam and Eve to go about their lives without a care in the world. They didn't have to worry about covering themselves up because they didn't know they were different from each other. The only thing they had to make sure of was not to eat from the tree of

knowledge. This, however, wasn't enough for Adam and Eve and their desire for knowledge set in. It then caused them to go against God's wishes.

The beginning of both relationships between the two creators and their creations was good. The creators' plans were working out fine and the creators figured that their intentions were for the best. However, in the end of both stories, the creations end up blaming their creators. In Rappaccini's Daughter," Beatrice and Giovanni blame Rappaccini for being too caught up in his science and not caring about what they went through. Also, the created beings turn on each other. Giovanni ends up blaming Beatrice for turning him into a poisonous creature. "Thou hast done it! Thou hast blasted me! Thou hast filled my veins with poison!" (27).

As for Genesis 3, Adam blames God for giving him the woman that offered him the fruit, which he ate. "The woman whom you gave to be with me she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). He also blames Eve for having given him the fruit. Eve in turn blames the serpent for tricking her into eating it. God's intention wasn't for Adam and Eve to feel hidden from the truth. He just wanted them to live happily.

In conclusion, God only wanted what was best for his creations. Rappaccini also wanted what was best for his creations, but his creations were his science experiments. However, he also had another creation which was his daughter, Beatrice. He wanted to protect her from society. Due to his character in the story, this is some twisted form of him wanting what was best for her. These creators didn't mean to shun their created beings away from things only they knew. They thought it was for their best interest. The creations on the other hand fell into the trap of the instigators and went against their creators' wishes. They ended up doing what was in their human nature and had the desire for knowledge. This desire, however, leads them to altering the relationship between them and their creators.

These stories go hand in hand due to the continuous references of Genesis 2-3 in “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” Like that of Genesis 2, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” has an Adam (Beatrice), Eve (Giovanni), God (Rappaccini), and a serpent (Professor Baglioni). Instead of having Giovanni as Adam, Beatrice is more like Adam in the sense that she was the first of her kind. Giovanni is more like Eve due to becoming poisonous like Beatrice. At first he wasn’t poisonous but Beatrice’s breath, like Adam’s rib, made Giovanni poisonous as well.

The Garden of Eden is referenced many times and resembles the garden which contains all of Rappaccini’s experiments. Upon looking at this garden, Giovanni was hesitant towards it and wasn’t sure how to evaluate it: “Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world?” (Hawthorne 14). Even when he meets up with Beatrice in that garden the author, Hawthorne, still describes it in a way that makes the reader feel uneasy about it: “And down he hastened into that Eden of poisonous flowers” (23). Hawthorne doesn’t just make it a reference to the Garden of Eden but also makes it sound eerie in the sense that it’s poisonous and yet Giovanni still goes in it. The very last time the Garden of Eden is mentioned is when Beatrice is about to die and says her last words: “[I] 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” (29).

All of the mentionings of the Garden of Eden are to purposely make the reader think about Genesis while reading this story. Another way in which these two stories are parallel to each other is that Beatrice was Rappaccini’s child as Adam and Eve were the children of God. Both of these creators wanted what was best for their child/children. Although their relationships changed for the worse, the incidences I’ve mentioned ended up opening the creators’ eyes that the creations were only human and can be forgiven for their mistakes. Although, according to Genesis, God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and made women bear children

and obey men, nowadays, one could say that he's forgiven them. Women now want to have children and are getting further and further away from the notion that they must obey men. As for Rappaccini, he most likely considered the fact that he was too harsh on Beatrice and regretted ever putting her through the pain he caused her.

Works Cited

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