Giovanni's Role in the Death of Beatrice: Unambiguous Intention of the Implied Author Embodied in its Successful Rhetorical Effects

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Introduction

"Rappaccini's Daughter" was included in *Mosses from an Old Mansion* in 1846, which "gives us the full range of Hawthorne's art in microcosm." The story describes a love story between Beatrice, the daughter of a local doctor, and Giovanni, who came to northern Italy for his further study. Beatrice's father, Giacomo Rappaccini, was so keen on medical experiments that he even took Beatrice as his experimental subject. He raised his daughter with venomous plants from her birth until her whole body has been imbued with poisons. Warned by Baglioni, Rappaccini's old friend, Giovanni increasingly suspected the presence of poison in Beatrice's body, but he could not resist his longing for her and kept meeting with the young beauty. After some time spent in her company, he found himself infested with poison just like his beloved, so he angrily cursed Beatrice. Finally Giovanni administered Beatrice the so-called antidote, which was offered by professor Baglioni. Heartbroken and desperate, Beatrice drank it and died under her father's and Giovanni's eyes.

Bernard McCabe pointed out that there were two major study orientations of Hawthorne: firstly, the complex of meanings and implications in this story; secondly, the literary methods Hawthorne adopted (213). In terms of interpretation of the implications, some scholars investigated the symbolic significance of garden settings and the poison in Beatrice, and argued that garden settings constitute a separate reality of their own, in other words, the other world distinguished from the world of common reality (Adams 242), whereas Crews described Beatrice's poisonousness in terms of sexuality (406). A group of scholars explored the profound meanings of this story: Brenzo studied Hawthorne's attitude towards science through his short-story "Rappaccini's Daughter," and discussed Hawthorne's distrust of science revealed by his criticism of single-minded scientific inquiry, here represented by Rappaccini's work (152), while Uroff believed that Hawthorne only

"treated vagaries of doctors and argued for more objectivity and dispassionate research" (62). Other critics referred to Milton and Spencer and viewed this tale as a description of the fallen world.

Studies in writing techniques mainly consist of two parts: the genre and the narrative technique. Haviland emphasized the allegorical nature of "Rappaccini's Daughter" instead of producing a simple reading of its symbolism (278). Jones went further and thought that "Rappaccini's Daughter" is an inversion of allegory which "offers itself a paradigm of the auto-destructive narrative" (155). McCabe pointed out that Hawthorne frequently and notably uses the device of an impersonal narrator who exists for both moral judgment and questions of fact, but the narrative device in *Rappaccini's Daughter* is more subtle compared with that in *The Scarlet Letter* (215).

This paper takes both interpretations into consideration with the purpose of revealing the unambiguous attentions of the implied author. Based on an analysis of the explicit narrative intervention and the implicit stylistic techniques, this paper reaches the conclusion that "Rappacinni's Daughter" is successful in its many rhetorical effects.

Conflicts in perceptions and attitudes between the narrator and the focalizer

At the very beginning the narrator introduces the background of this story: it took place a long time ago in Padua and the protagonist is Giovanni, a young Italian, whose room overlooks Rappaccini's garden. Promptly, the point of view shifts from the omniscient perspective of the narrator to Giovanni's selective omniscience. What Giovanni saw and heard gives us a most authentic impression as the selective omniscient perspective arouses the readers' interest: the reader may wonder then why Rappaccini avoids any physical touch of the plants in the garden, while Beatrice is bold enough to take care of them "physically," as well as why professor Baglioni keeps slandering both Rappaccini and Beatrice. Besides, internal focalization shortens the distance between the narrator and readers, offering opportunities for them to have a closer look at Giovanni's inner world, which makes readers aware of his shallowness and insincerity.

Nevertheless, during Giovanni's selective omniscient narration, the narrator sometimes interrupts the smooth narrative flow and delivers boldly his commentary on events and characters, which makes our judgment and attitude directly guided by the mediation of the narrator's commentary (Jones

157). After Giovanni meets with Professor Baglioni for the first time, the narrator comments that

> [t]he 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 Dr. Rappaccini, in which the latter was generally thought to have gained the advantage. (13)

In order to support his reliability, the narrator goes further and suggests: that "if the reader [is] inclined to judge for himself, we refer him to certain black-letter tracts on both sides, preserved in the medical department of the University of Padua" (13). This commentary reveals that Baglioni is undoubtedly unreliable for he is deeply prejudiced against Rappaccini and his daughter as he believes that Rappaccini occupies a superior position in the medical field. The description of Baglioni's inner feelings further exposes his selfish motives: "Besides, it is too insufferable an impertinence in Rappaccini, thus to snatch the lad out of my own hands […]. Perchance, most learned Rappaccini, I may foil you where you little dream of it" (21). In fact, Baglioni does not care about Giovanni at all and he only takes him as a stepping stone in order to defeat his rival. Nevertheless, Giovanni is made to change his attitude towards Beatrice slightly, every time he encounters Baglioni. Because of Baglioni's words, Giovanni suspects that Beatrice and even old Lisabetta are involved in Rappaccini's conspiracy, and after his third meeting with Baglioni, he begins to fear that Beatrice is spiritually gained by evil, just like her poisonous body.

From a selected omniscient view, it is impossible for Giovanni's mind to encompass the whole event, whereas the narrator is able to assume the full powers of an omniscient point of view (Ross 341). As a consequence, the narrator's commentary has a power of "superior authority" (*ibid.*) to influence the readers who accordingly question Giovanni's judgments on what he heard and saw. Therefore, the commentary here not only reveals the unreliability of Baglioni but also convinces readers of Giovanni's unreliable nature as he naively takes Baglioni's statements for granted. Through the suggestions offered by the narrator, we can easily recognize the fact that the narrator's commentary on Baglioni is grounded enough, which creates the image of a reliable narrator in the eyes of the readers. Actually, this suggestion implicitly anticipates the reaction of Giovanni: he believed what Professor Baglioni said, which helps to arouse a certain amount of anticipation in the readers according to which Giovanni may make a different choice. However,

every time he talks with Baglioni, Giovanni's doubts about Beatrice increase. His growing doubts in Beatrice run counter to the anticipation of the readers. In this way, the attitude of the implied author is successfully presented, that it is Giovanni himself who challenges any hope of happiness.

Conflicts between the narrator and Giovanni are especially presented by their diverging perceptions and opinions about Beatrice. Before the moment he is about to check whether Beatrice is evil in spirit, Giovanni looks into the mirror and reassuringly thinks he is healthy and energetic. The narrator argues that his behavior in such a special moment shows "his shallow feelings and insincere character" (36), a judgment which is not reached casually because the narrator keeps an unflinching eye on Giovanni's behaviors and inner feelings. When he overlooks the garden for the first time, Giovanni felt "some strange peril" (10) because of the respective diverging attitudes of Rappaccini and Beatrice towards the flowers and shrubs. However, when he gets up the next morning, he surprisingly notices that the garden is real and even pleasant, enjoying the "privilege of overlooking this spot of lovely and luxuriant vegetation" (11). Upon his dramatic change in attitude, the narrator states that

> there is an influence in the light of morning that tends to rectify whatever errors of fancy, or even of judgment, we may have incurred during the sun's decline, or among the shadows of the night, or in the less wholesome glow of moonshine. (10)

We know that "moonlight leads to a different hue to reality since moonshine conflates reality and dreams and obscures what people meet" (Moore 80). This statement shows the nature of the danger Giovanni sensed the night before and the falsity of his judgment as he mixes fancy and reality, which also reveals an inflection of the narrator's rational standpoint. Furthermore, this commentary makes what Giovanni saw from the "peculiar vantage" (Stouck & Giltrow 567) "shrouded by the shadow of the wall" and consequetly unreliable. Therefore, when Giovanni seems to see that the breath of Beatrice kills insects or when the bouquet withers in her grasp, readers may question immediately whether it is the result of Giovanni's fancy. With his murmur: "Am I awake? Have I my senses?" (16) and the fact that "there could be no possibility of distinguishing a faded flower from a fresh one at so great a distance"(18), what Giovanni sees looks much more like a fantasy, which suggests that Giovanni's doubts about Beatrice are not based on solid evidence suggesting again that Hawthorne mocks Giovanni's apparently

groundless fears. The narrator insists that although Beatrice is poisonous in her body, she is a "pure" girl. Before Giovanni meets Beatrice for the last time, he thinks of the religious serenity Beatrice brought him. In his memory, the narrator evaluates

> [the] recollections which, had Giovanni known how to estimate them, would have assured him that all this ugly mystery was but an earthly illusion, and that, whatever mist of evil might seem to have gathered over her, the real Beatrice was a heavenly angel." (38)

This evaluation exposes that "Giovanni's moral error is to confuse Beatrice's earthly component (the poison) with her spirit, which actually remains angelic to the end" (Crews 403). On the contrary, the narrator grasps a comprehensive understanding of Beatrice: she is a pure and gentle girl, although her body is imbued with poisons. Compared with Giovanni's partial understanding of Beatrice, the reliability of the narrator is here firmly set up. The evaluation directly shows that the narrator takes a positive attitude towards Beatrice and once again gives anticipation to the reader that maybe Giovanni is able to realize the purity and goodness of Beatrice's nature, which calls for his deep and sincere affection for her. Nevertheless, after he fearfully realizes that he has eventually been infected by Beatrice, what Giovanni expresses is nothing but curse and anger, having no single sign of mercy on his lover, which is perfectly consistent with the narrator's judgment on him.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE IMPLIED AUTHOR BEHIND STYLISTIC TECHNIQUES

The narrator also shows his diverging attitude towards Giovanni and Beatrice through his choice of words. In "Rappaccini's Daughter," the narrator describes Beatrice's "voice as rich as a tropical sunset," and she is "the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day and redundant with life, health and energy" (9). After he enters the garden to have a talk with Beatrice, Giovanni finds out that she is not just good-looking, but that she also has thoughts and fantasies "as if diamonds and rubies sparkled" (27). We can easily figure out that in the eyes of the narrator, Beatrice remains healthy, energetic and pure. With repeated similes and gorgeous adjectives, the narrator shapes an absolutely positive image of Beatrice, who possesses the power of bringing calmness to people although she is herself unfairly treated. These descriptions impress the readers with Beatrice's fine quality. In addition, the narrator gives Beatrice chances to declare her innocence: "if

true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence" (26) is Beatrice's answer to Giovanni's request and also a reminder, to Giovanni and to the readers, that "there is something truer and more real than what we can see with the eyes and touch with the finger" (35). These words demonstrate that the narrator takes Beatrice's side. They also suggest that the readers should get a deep understanding of her nature or "grasp the higher truth of intuition instead of sensory perception" (Male 105).

On the contrary, like in the description of Giovanni, the narrator says that things seem to be, rather than that they are what they are. The use of uncertain verbs admit firstly the possibility of Giovanni's fancy but at the same time reveal its uncertainty (Stouck & Giltrow 563). Meanwhile, the narrator vividly depicts Giovanni's doubts and hesitations by the frequent use of rhetorical questions and parallelism. After Baglioni guesses that Giovanni has become the new experimental subject of Rappaccini, a sudden doubt comes across Giovanni's mind:

> whether this intense interest on his part were not delusory; whether it were really of so deep and positive a nature as to justify him in now thrusting himself into an incalculable position; whether it were not merely the fantasy of a young man's brain, only slightly or not at all connected with his heart." (23)

In fact, Giovanni regards his feelings towards Beatrice as a kind of intense interest but even that interest is doubted by him. Just as Crews stated that Giovanni's emotions are anything but unchecked, they are hampered at every moment by inhibitions from half-submerged doubts and reservations and even his lust contains an element of calculation (411). Considering his usage of words and rhetorical devices, it is obvious that the narrator holds completely opposite attitudes towards Giovanni and Beatrice. The more wonderful Beatrice is in the eyes of the narrator, the more undesirable Giovanni is in the reader's view. The sharp contrast affecting the two characters leaves a deep impression on the readers, which undoubtedly helps them to agree with the narrator and the implied author behind him.

Dawkins argued that writers use punctuation marks for their intended meanings and emphasis by following "principles" rather than "rules" (534). In *Rappaccini's Daughter,* Hawthorne recurrently uses certain sings of punctuations, especially the dash, which seems of great importance for him to convey his intentions, and indeed, the frequent use of the dash in this story contributes to its success in terms of rhetorical effects.

"He paused – hesitated – turned half about – but again went on." (23). This sentence perfectly rebuilds Giovanni's conflicting inner world when he follows Lisabetta into the garden. Three dashes and three actions, through which the narrator on the one hand reveals the feeble nature of Giovanni and on the other calls to mind his inner struggle, something the narrator suggests early in the story: either Giovanni leaves the Rappaccinis resolutely or he accepts Beatrice without any restraint, *i.e.* physically and morally. Obviously, although he is attracted to Beatrice, Giovanni fears that she is evil, both in her body and in her very nature, just as some rumors said. The repeated use of the dash gives the readers a chance to have a close look at Giovanni's mind and to realize the shallowness of his feelings, thus reaching the expectations of the narrator. In Baglioni's words, the narrator's repeated uses of the dash entails that "[Giovanni] should receive little credit for such instances of success – they being probably the work of chance – but should be held strictly accountable for his failures, which may justly be considered his own work" (13). The dash here symbolizes the interruption and the turn of his discourse indicates the sudden stops and the random transitions of his thoughts. In his apparently sincere comment on Rappaccini, Baglioni believes that the latter's success came because of mere luck, while he should take full responsibility for his mistakes. But by using repeated dashes, the narrator clearly shows the shift in Baglioni's thoughts: although he has a clear idea of Rappaccini's medical skills, Baglioni is not willing to accept it for the sake of his own interest. Paradoxically, by giving Baglioni's colored commentary a fairly objective tone, the narrator makes it quite easy for the readers to figure out Baglioni's selfishness and unreliability; it also paves the way to the narrator's denial of Giovanni's honesty.

In addition, at the very moment Beatrice is about to drink the antidote, she ominously declares to Giovanni: "I will drink – but do you await the result!" (42). Again, the dash reveals an interruption and turn of discourse but this time it bears more importance in its rhetorical effect. Throughout the whole story, there are no complaints from Beatrice on her miserable fate and there is no mercy or regret for her neither from Rappaccini or Giovanni. What's more, while Beatrice is dying, there is no description of Rappaccini's and Giovanni's reactions. The dash tells the readers that Beatrice has always known what the result would be. The reason why she decides to drink it all the same is because she wants to take revenge, even at the expense of her own life. This is the first time Beatrice expresses her anger, but paradoxically it is not without hope: her death may make her father and Giovanni realize their respective faults. Despite Beatrice's loving care for Giovanni and the

sacrifice of her life to prove her innocence, Giovanni partially believes what Baglioni said and has no real mercy for Beatrice. Who will deny then that Giovanni has more poison in him that anybody else?

Conclusion

In *Rappaccini's Daughter*, the narrator manages to manipulate the readers' vision of the real causes of the tragedy, which makes this story a typical example of successful rhetorical effects. Hawthorne artfully uses the narrator to deliver his commentary on the characters' actions and psychological quandaries, thus communicating directly with the readers and brilliantly succeeding in guiding their attitude. In order to prevent the readers' possible repulsion of direct intervention, Hawthorne refines his stylistic technique and embeds his intentions in dictions, various rhetorical devices and punctuation with the aim of implicitly and surreptitiously influencing the readers' reactions. Explicit narrative techniques intertwine with implicit stylistic choices throughout the whole story and make it consistent with Hawthorne's conviction that Giovanni is the one who should assume the major responsibility in the tragic ending of this "love story."

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