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# The Conquering Powers of Love in Chosen Fantasies of George MacDonald and Nathaniel Hawthorne

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The fact that love as a central theme has played an important role in literature throughout the ages is apparent in the two fantasies chosen for this analysis. “The Day Boy and The Night Girl” by George MacDonald and “Rappaccini’s Daughter” by Nathaniel Hawthorne are both captivating stories for children and adults alike, which highlight love, and the different types of love in life. The focus for this dissertation lies in the conquering powers of love, which plays a central role in both these stories. Furthermore, as the lessons of love are similar in these fantasies, there are other important themes that relate the two stories, especially noteworthy are the themes of education and rigid upbringing, isolation and polarisation, and light and darkness. Although the stories have different endings, then it is love – the crude, natural, and mutual love – which really wins in both instances. The similar themes in these stories have the ability to teach different lessons, as the final meaning of the tales is left up for the reader. However, it is the mutually felt natural love that wins over fears grown from isolation and scientific experiments in the end. Thus, how do these fantasies show the importance and powers of this kind of love, especially when it stands in conflict with fears and self-love?

The central themes in these stories are love of mutual respect, which stands opposed to self-love, rigid and science-based upbringing fuelling fear, isolation, and polarised environments; but before going into analysis it is important to define the meanings of love of mutual respect and scientific experiments. Love of mutual respect here is seen as the organic love between two people who know, understand, and respect each other’s shortcomings yet choose to love and support one another nonetheless. The matter of love stands in opposition with fear grown from scientific experiments and while the experiments in themselves might not necessarily be negative, then in these stories they are morally debatable – the individuals experimented on have given no consent for it. Considering that the characters’ lives in these stories are controlled with these experiments, then how does love conquer the fears grown from the unknown? It is not only the polarised environments and arduous education that stand in the way of love, but it is the deep fears grown from these matters. However, the stories show that it is love, mutual respect, and trust that win over these cruel human experiments and fears grown from these, showing that organic love is a stronger force in life than negative feelings. In simpler terms, it showcases how good will always triumph over evil.

MacDonald’s story of Nycteris and Photogen is a prime example of a fairy tale in the sense that it answers, or addresses, the “eternal questions” which, according to Bruno Bettelheim, are “What is the world really like? How am I to live my life in it? How can I

truly be myself?” (45). Although showing some typical didactic outlines, there is much in the story that is left open for personal interpretation, which is very typical of MacDonald and his writing, according to Yuri Cowan who writes that it is MacDonald’s “emphasis on individual interpretation that colours his views on art” (39). Thus, the answers to the ‘eternal questions’ are left open for personal interpretation in this story, as MacDonald uses a mode “that takes into account the variety of individual experience and the importance of individual effort in action and interpretation” (Cowan 49); furthermore, as MacDonald himself “believed that fairy tales convey meaning through the imagination” (Marshall 59), then we can pinpoint how important it is to use imagination when reading and interpreting fairy tales, and “The Day Boy and the Night Girl” is no exception to this.

The same can be said about Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter”, where the ultimate meaning and morale is left for the reader to make sense of. Although his writing hints at mediums through which Hawthorne himself might have been intending his story to be interpreted, his style of writing still preferences individual interpretation of the reader. His narrative style, which creates ambiguity in the reader, further develops this idea as it “creates a shifting ambivalence” (Cooper 497) in the reader towards the characters in the story and ultimately towards the overall meaning of the tale. Hawthorne’s narration pushes the reader to see the situations from different points of view and ask questions about the truthfulness of the characters, so the “narrator contributes to the bewilderment” (Cooper 498) and it is the same bewilderment which ultimately leads to the many different interpretations of both the characters and the overall story. Cooper further explains this idea: “Hawthorne invites a confusion of the territories of objectivity and imagination and defies the authority of any one solution” (Cooper 499) which is why it is not unheard of that before fully understanding the story, one has to read it multiple times.

“The Day Boy and the Night Girl” shows how, despite the polarised environments, rigid education and upbringing, and the scientific experiment that is the two characters’ lives, in order to live happily ever after, free of fear and ignorance, Photogen and Nycteris need to trust one another. As Cynthia Marshall writes in her article, “the final point of the tale is the necessary joining of the realms of darkness and light” (57), showing just how important their mutual trust and love is. The lives of the two children have been but a human experiment for the witch Watho, “who desired to know everything” (MacDonald 2), but “cared for nothing in itself – only for knowing it”. The essence of the witch’s experiment is to make the children grow up in opposite environments – Photogen is to never see the darkness while Nycteris is

to not know of sun and light. At the same time, while Photogen gets a wide-reaching education, then Nycteris is to spend her days in a dark tomb and the only education she gets is of a little music. The negative effect of the witch's experiment is hidden in the fears that arise in the teenagers' mind when in due time faced with environments unknown to them.

Essential themes in the story of Photogen and Nycteris are polarisation and isolation, which are implicitly connected to each other, both being the key elements in witch Watho's experiment on their lives. Apart from the obvious polarisation – darkness and light – then while Nycteris is isolated from any real world and confined to a dark tomb, then Photogen is likewise isolated from half of the world, as he is to only bask in sunlight and enjoy his life. However, in the end it is the polarisation of the two that pushes them to trust each other and therefore also fall in love, because either sees something unknown but positive in the other. With the polarisation of the characters and their lives another powerful elements that contribute to the story are the realms of darkness and light; and even though the witch's cruel plan for Nycteris is to only know darkness, then she fails in it, as utter and complete darkness is something Nycteris does not experience before the dim lamp in her room goes out: “therefore it flashed upon her that the lamp was dead, that this brokenness was the death of which she had read without understanding, that the darkness had killed the lamp” (MacDonald 10). As opposed to Watho's plan, Nycteris is as afraid of complete darkness as Photogen is and knows “less about darkness than she did about light” (MacDonald 10).

However, when Nycteris first experiences complete darkness it is not fear of the darkness that arises in her, but rather it is her natural curiosity, the desire to know more about the world. Her natural curiosity is the driving force which, during the turning point of the story, also leads to her meeting with Photogen. Furthermore, it is Nycteris' belief in the good of light that comes together in the gem hidden in “The Day Boy and the Night Girl”: “But when we are following the light, even it's extinction is a guide” (MacDonald 12) which brings us back to MacDonald's preferred mode allegory and how he “wanted his fantasies to help his readers better come to terms with their own spirituality” (Cowan 39) and furthermore “to encourage his readers to have active spiritual imaginations” (Cowan 49). Moreover, the guiding light in this tale results in Nycteris finding love and ever-lasting happiness.

The turning point for the story is the first meeting of the two teenagers when Nycteris, discovering the wonders of the night-time garden, stumbles upon Photogen who is laying, terrified of the darkness, on the grass. Nycteris cannot really understand why he is afraid of the dark or even why he calls this dark, as for her it is daytime. “I can't think why you should

be frightened, or call it dark!” (MacDonald 23). In consequence, when Photogen asks Nycteris to stay by his side and take care of him, she agrees, “forgetting all her own danger” (MacDonald 24). Yet, when the tables turn when sun rises, and Nycteris is the one who asks for help being, frightened of the pure light now surrounding her, then Photogen leaves her with his newfound courage from the sunshine, plainly choosing self-love over caring for another. This raises a problematic issue in the fairy tale: is self-love more important than mutual love? And if not, then can love of mutual respect overcome this self-love? Evidently, as the idea of the unknown being the source of our biggest fears, it is the instinct to stay alive and take care of ourselves first is a priority when encountering new situations. In opposition to this, it was Nycteris’ first instinct to stay and keep guard over Photogen when he was afraid, forgetting about her own danger and putting someone else’s welfare first. Considering how afraid Photogen is of the darkness, and how he finds comfort in another, then could love help overcome this fear of the unknown? In Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter” the turning point of the story raises the same questions, as Giovanni is unable to suppress his fears and love for self, choosing away from the possibility of love, trust, and mutual respect; and with this choice indirectly condemns Beatrice to her death.

As the story of Photogen and Nycteris advances after their first meeting, Photogen tries to conquer his fear of darkness by overcoming his cowardice on his own. It is the cowardice he is ashamed of which shows how it is self-love that is important to him. Significantly, “seven times in all, he tried to face the coming night in the strength of the past, and seven times he failed” (MacDonald 29) before he falls ill. We learn the importance of his efforts at the end of the tale, as it is only when Photogen chooses the love and trust for Nycteris that he finally overcomes his fears, showing how it is love for another that is more important in life, and which ultimately conquers fears. Additionally, Photogen trying to overcome his fears and feeling of shame on his own can be seen as an attempt to mature and oppose his rigid upbringing. He understands that leaving Nycteris to face the day alone was cowardly of him and he is content to never make this mistake again; perhaps there was something deeper, like love, taking a hold of him already. Still, it is only when he accepts their mutual love and differences that he overcomes his fears and matures.

The fairy tale ends with Photogen and Nycteris escaping from the witch Watho, because the latter, understanding that her experiment has failed, has decided to kill Nycteris and after her Photogen too. The two teens, talking in the dead of night, express their fears and feelings for each other, which makes them understand their polarised and isolated lives.

Furthermore, their mutual understanding and overcoming of their fears shows how they have matured during this tale, which here “refers to the natural, pre-determined aspect of a person’s physical and mental development” (Petzold, 11), showing that even though Photogen and Nycteris have been taught otherwise, they follow what they believe in their hearts to be right and good. This resolution differs greatly from “Rappaccini’s Daughter’s” ending, where it is not maturation but selfishness that wins, which will be explained in detail later.

The significance of the eighteenth chapter “Refuge” in “The Day Boy and the Night Girl” is the necessary trust between the two teens to overcome their troubles and fears, resulting in the joining of darkness and light. When Nycteris says “I live under the pale lamp, and I die under the bright one” (MacDonald 33), Photogen finally understands that she is the opposite of him, and that she fears light as much as he fears darkness. However, at this point Photogen is aware of Nycteris’ importance for him even before he realises her background or that she is the opposite of him, as he calls her the “live armor to” his heart (MacDonald 33), suggesting the depth of his affection towards the “beautiful creature” (MacDonald 34) as he later refers to her. So, when Photogen finally does accept Nycteris’ plead to set out at once and not wait for the sun to rise, he chooses trust and love which ultimately are the forces that help him overcome his fears and cowardice. We learn that it is the trust and mutual love that overpower because Photogen was ashamed of his actions and cowardice but could not overcome these feelings alone.

Although with a similar storyline to “The Day Boy and the Night Girl”, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” has a very different ending from MacDonald’s fairy tale, as opposed to the characters living happily ever after, Beatrice chooses to die for love. The power of love in this tale somewhat differs from the love in the other fairy tale; namely, in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” it is not love of mutual respect that wins in a traditional sense, but rather it is the love of self, as it is Giovanni that succumbs to his fears and in a way tries to force Beatrice to change, killing her as a result. However, the conquering powers of love over fear grown from the unknown are still present, as there are ways in which love does win, especially when seeing Beatrice’s death from her point of view – she chooses her love for Giovanni and dies as a result of this choice. Considering the possibility that she might know that the antidote is fatal for her, she protects Giovanni from death with her choice. Just as in MacDonald’s tale, polarisation of environments, isolation of the characters, and rigid education are themes that play a role in the effects of eventual growth of love and fears.

The story is about Beatrice and Giovanni who fall in love as a result of an experiment conducted by Beatrice's father Rappaccini. There are similarities between Rappaccini and the witch Watho from MacDonald's fairy tale: precisely like Watho who was indifferent towards the subjects she was testing on, so it is said about Rappaccini that: "he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment" (Hawthorne 35). Taking into consideration that Beatrice's whole life is an experiment for Rappaccini, then we could draw some conclusions about how he really feels about his daughter. However, the centre of the story, according to Morton Ross, is "to dramatize, at length and in great detail, the process by which Giovanni Guasconti comes to a judgement of Beatrice Rappaccini" (3), his judgement really being a decision between mutual love and self-love.

The garden which Doctor Rappaccini has cultivated with care for years, and which also happens the only place Beatrice can go to beyond the walls of her home, plays a big role in the theme of isolation in Hawthorne's story. We learn of the importance of the garden for Beatrice when her father asks for her help when tending to the plants, and it is only Beatrice who can touch the luxurious shrub seemingly being the jewel of the garden (Hawthorne 30-32). In a similar fashion to the way Nycteris grew in her dark tomb, so is Beatrice confined to the garden, being cut off from human contact or interaction with the outside world. Just as Marshall writes in her article, "the garden, instead of being a place of joy and innocence, is a place of melancholy and evil" (Marshall 186), until one day Giovanni finds his way there; what remains unclear is whether Rappaccini is behind the two young people's meeting. Giovanni's coming to the garden awakens unknown feelings in Beatrice making her forget about her solitude. After taking a stroll around the garden with Giovanni, she exclaims "For the first time in my life, ... I had forgotten thee!" (Hawthorne 44) when they come to her sister shrub, marking the magnitude of the fresh perspective Giovanni brings her, accentuating the importance he is about to play in Beatrice's life that up to this point has been nothing more than lonely.

As opposed to "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" where the feelings between the two characters are not directly mentioned before the end of the tale, then in "Rappaccini's Daughter" the evidence of growing love and the confusion these feelings raise in Giovanni is apparent from the beginning of their mutual meetings. Moreover, the way the love between the two is described by the narrator enhances the reader's understanding of the confusion

Giovanni experiences, especially in the paragraph where Giovanni sees that Beatrice's touch had hurt his hand:

“Oh, how stubbornly does love – or even that cunning semblance of love which flourishes in the imagination, but strikes no depth of root into the heart – how stubbornly does it hold its faith, until the moment come, when it is doomed to vanish into thin mist! Giovanni wrapped a handkerchief about his hand and wondered what evil thing had stung him, and soon forgot his pain in a reverie of Beatrice.” (Hawthorne 46)

Unknown to Giovanni at this point, but in the end it will be the same doubtful thinking that dooms his love. The doubts in his mind grow into fears of the unknown, and instead of trusting the woman who has been nothing but honest with him, he chooses self-love and never conquers his fears.

Throughout the tale, Giovanni is torn between what he thinks he should feel for Beatrice and what he really feels. As Brenzo writes in his article, “their looks and words, indicate they are in love” but it is merely an indication and consequently “their love has no sexual dimension” (157). This, on the one side is understandable as Beatrice has never thought she could ever love anyone, or that anyone could ever love her being cut off from the human world like she is, yet on the other side could be seen as the reason why Giovanni simply cannot decide how he feels about Beatrice. He is happy to spend time with her, but the love he feels “has no firm roots in his heart” (Brenzo, 157), so he feels there is something missing and he cannot find contentment with what they have, yearning for more. This is the evidence of his self-love; and these hints somewhat give away the ending, because if Giovanni cannot trust Beatrice during their time together, then how is he to choose their love over the love he has for himself in the end?

The turning point in “Rappaccini's Daughter” which is similar to the one in “The Day Boy and the Night Girl”, happens at the end of the tale when Giovanni confronts Beatrice about her poisonous breath and her sister shrub after finding out that his own breath has turned poisonous to living things. He understands the isolation and pain this poison has caused Beatrice, yet instead of putting the love for another first, he blames Beatrice for being the “accursed one” (Hawthorne 53), and of being responsible for setting him up for the same fate as hers – isolation from human contact. The effect of the turning point, just as in MacDonald's story, is that Giovanni chooses self-love over love for another, unable to see past the scientific experiment that Beatrice is. This means that the fears that doubt has grown inside him take control and he succumbs to their powers. As a result, Giovanni refuses to mature and ‘accept the mature responsibility’ which is the love that he could choose,

evidently also failing to become 'happy in maturity' (Askew, 336) and more human, as love of mutual respect is shown to be primarily human in this tale. This is similar to the self-love that Photogen chooses in MacDonald's fairy tale, with the exception that in the end Photogen realises his mistake and chooses to mature and be happy with someone else, and to overcome his fears. It is possible to speculate that if Giovanni could have seen past the scientific experiment that he was made into – like Photogen was – and would have chosen to love Beatrice while also overcoming his fears, then they could have matured together and shared a love that would have been able to withstand everything, just as the love Photogen and Nycteris found and chose to accept.

"Rappaccini's Daughter" ends with the death of Beatrice when she accepts the antidote which Giovanni gives her. It remains unknown whether she knows that the poison is going to kill her, but the way in which she accepts the antidote and advises Giovanni to wait and see the outcome of her ingesting it, suggests that she suspects it will be fatal. In essence, she sacrifices herself and saves Giovanni's life, meaning that she chooses the love she feels towards Giovanni over her own life. This mature decision shows that after years of living in isolation and being cut off from every human experience, dying is easier than facing the rest of her life in the same manner. The decision to die also highlights how she feels about Giovanni. On the other hand, this decision shows the sadness that Giovanni's behaviour brings her, because he does not trust her and turns away from her, accusing her of poisoning him. Therefore, as Beatrice chooses to die, she chooses to die loving someone as opposed to living the rest of her life without love.

Hawthorne's writing "clearly suggests that love, a love of mutual respect, would have been, if not a solution, at least a melioration of the isolation of Giovanni and Beatrice" (Kloeckner, 326), for "if they should be cruel to one another, who was there to be kind to them?" (Hawthorne 55), underlining the importance of mutual trust and respect. The way Giovanni feels after his outburst when confronting Beatrice highlights how accepting Beatrice for who she is, and furthermore accepting their love could have saved them both. There are similarities with the ending of "The Day Boy and the Night Girl", where Photogen and Nycteris find their happily ever after, but not before they have learned to trust and lean on each other. While they choose to be kind to one another when the world around them is cruel to them, and choose to let love light the way in their lives, facing their fears and conquering them together, then the way Giovanni draws away from the possibility of a life together with Beatrice and chooses self-love, while letting his fear of the unknown win,

shows how he might not believe in the powers of love of mutual respect. Yet, as Hawthorne suggests, it is only this kind of love that would have conquered the ultimate cause of sorrow in Beatrice's life, which is the isolation caused by his father through the poison of her sister shrub (Brenzo, 156); so, the choice Beatrice makes to die shows how she chooses love over the isolation, love for Giovanni over the fear that she will never love again.

While in "Rappaccini's Daughter" the need for love because of the human experiment that is Beatrice's life is apparent, it is not so in "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" where love between Photogen and Nycters just happens as neither of them are looking for it. Beatrice expresses how the coming of Giovanni brings light into her isolated life which in a way points to how she sees Giovanni as the antidote to her loneliness. Yet, however much Beatrice needs the love because of her isolation, the situation is different when seen from Giovanni's point of view: he was made into a social and scientific experiment by Rappaccini who was driven foremost by his love for science, when setting up the meeting between the two youths, and consequently experiment on Giovanni's life. Furthermore, even though the experiment was a success, as Rappaccini himself explains:

"My daughter... thou art no longer lonely in the world [...] My science, and the sympathy between thee and him, have so wrought within his system, that he now stands apart from common men [...] Pass on, then, through the world, most dear to one another, and dreadful to all besides!"(Hawthorne 54).

Then when Giovanni understands that Beatrice, and therefore also their whole relationship, is nothing else than an experiment, the need for love for him diminishes. Unable to see past the scientific side of their relationship, the feelings, even though superficial from the beginning, that he once felt die as doubt and fears that have grown from the unknown win.

So, as the two fantasies discover love and respect, they teach a valuable lesson to any reader, which Bettelheim also mentions: that those who do not turn away from struggles, but dare to try to fight, can reach their true identity and be rewarded with a good life, whereas those who let fear take control, and are "too narrow-minded", risk the opposite if not an even worse fate (Bettelheim 24). These are the lessons that both "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" and "Rappaccini's Daughter" tackle: the first showing how good life is achievable through facing and overcoming one's fears; with the latter ending with a much sadder fate, as fears are not overcome.

Although both MacDonald's and Hawthorne's writing style indicate the importance of personal interpretation, then these two stories share similarities in their exploration of love as a power of nature. Whereas in MacDonald's fantasy it is the crude and natural mutual love

that conquers the character's fears, then Hawthorne's story implies that it is the same kind of love that could have spared Beatrice's life in the end. Therefore, both these stories express the conquering powers of mutual love and respect, when painting love as a force with the ability to overcome anything, if only it is welcomed and accepted in the heart. The negativity and evil that the characters in these fantasies experience is, or could be, ultimately lessened by the natural, all-reaching, crude love. Even though the eventual significance of the fantasies is up for personal interpretation, then the conclusion that love is a strong force of nature able to withstand and conquer any negativity is undeniable.

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