

# Literary analysis the birthmark by nathaniel hawthorne



“ Let the attempt be made, at whatever risk. The danger is nothing to me ... while this hateful mark makes me the object of your horror and disgust, life is a burden which I would fling down with joy. (Hawthorne, 2016) This passage is one of the most telling of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s main character in *The Birthmark*, Aylmer, a chemical scientist, and a perfectionist.

In this thrilling yet bleak short story, Hawthorne brings to life the boldness and snobbishness in his character, Aylmer. It is noted that in this tale, Hawthorne weaves a detailed and complex argument that *The Birth-Mark* stands as an alchemic allegory, explaining that the relationship between the characters exemplifies a somewhat explosive chemical reaction (Howard, 2012).

According to Bibliography. com, in 1804, Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Massachusetts. Because of the time period, Puritans was a major influence (Editors, 2014). Hawthorne is thought to be in the genre of American Romanticist whose style was swayed by Henry James, William Faulkner, and Herman Melville (Nowatzki, 2010). In his writing, Hawthorne seeks to advance and enlighten his subjects who, in his stories, are living within the normal society, are somehow separated from the norm. This is by situations often beyond their control. Hawthorne tends to use continuing themes in his writing style, such as alienation, guilt, pride treated as evil, and allegory (Howard, 2012).

“ *The Birthmark*,” tells the story of scientist Aylmer who marries a beautiful woman, the woman of his dreams, Georgina. He loves her and sees her be perfect until he notices a birthmark on her face. Their marriage was

seemingly perfect until that time, but soon after, the birthmark takes over his emotions and his mind. The blemish was in the center of his wife's cheek, crimson red, and was shaped like a miniature hand. Georgina's past lovers felt completely different than her husband; they loved her birthmark. Howard notes that her exes often said that some fairy at her birth hour had laid her tiny hand upon the infant's cheek and left this impress there in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts. (Howard, 2012) These men would have done anything to have the same woman whose husband couldn't stand the sight of her because of this imperfection (Pearson, et al, 2013).

The mark was symbolic. Something so innocent which caused her murder. The blemish disappeared when she blushed red, the color of the mark. However, as her blush faded, the mark came back even stronger, appearing as though it were a crimson stain upon the snow, which tended to frighten Aylmer in its imperfection. He feels the birthmark ruins her and their relationship, and he gets so completely obsessed that he begins to dream of removing the imperfection, the birthmark. He cuts so deeply in his dreams that the blemish ends up in her heart. This shows how Aylmer, and in turn Hawthorne, believe that imperfection goes deeper than what is seen on the outside.

Howard (2012) shares that the tie between the blemish and Georgina is a reference to the association between the blemish and the life that Georgina led. With the mark leading to her heart makes it appear that Aylmer loves Georgina. However, Aylmer is out of control, cold and calculating, with an evil heart. The scientist is unrealistically determined, to return his wife to a <https://assignbuster.com/literary-analysis-the-birthmark-by-nathaniel-hawthorne/>

perfect state. He is finally able to, through his knowledge of science, rid his wife of the blemish. Yet, removing that was a part of her caused her to die. So, it is, in the end, that Aylmer's pride finally destroys beautiful Georgina who would have loved him for his entire life.

Howard (2012) likens Aylmer to Jekyll and Hyde, a gothic novel about another scientist who goes irrational, in that the ending of both stories represent the same pattern: death at the hands of a cruel, miscalculating science. Analysts discuss Aylmer's extreme egotistic behavior and attitude. This, in which, can be seen from his constant use of the personal pronouns like I, me, and mine; demonstrating to the reader that all emphasis is on himself. He wants all attention, focus, and rewards to be focused on him, and this makes him feel powerful and successful. In *The Birthmark*, as well as other works by Hawthorne, the author is genuinely concerned about why people respond to events in certain ways and begs the question of what the moral nature is, as well as the consequences of such behavior, both on themselves and on those who are close to them. *The Birthmark* also sheds light on the potential fear of men regarding the fundamental differences between men's and women's bodies, and the perfection that is desired from a husband of a wife (Howard, 2012).

"*The Birthmark*," strives to be a romance and encourages the reader's compassion, but it also seeks to teach a few lessons, such as pride is a necessary thing in achieving success in a task, however, if pride is too extensive, it can be detrimental in scientific and medical research (Howard, 2012). Additionally, it should be gathered by the reader that medical

professionals must be able to let go of a little of their analytical qualities and <https://assignbuster.com/literary-analysis-the-birthmark-by-nathaniel-hawthorne/>

weave in a bit of empathy into their intellect. Finally, the readers are encouraged to never forget that it is rarely a good idea for medical professionals, scientists, and doctors to treat anyone who is close to them, like family and spouses, and most importantly, physicians are to never do any harm to patients (Pearson, 2013).

The problem, in the end, with Aylmer, was his pride and his obsessive need for perfection, not only in himself but in those around him. Perhaps if Georgina had not been so flawless in every other respect, Aylmer could have dealt with the blemish. Instead, the scientist felt that the blemish was stealing perfection from her, and by that, stealing perfection from himself. The defect, which was minimal and appreciated by other men, grew more and more menacing to him until he, subconsciously, perhaps, would rather not have Georgina at all than to have her flawed.