

American romanticism

[History](#), [American History](#)



The Literary movement and story I decided to choose was American Romanticism, and "The Birthmark" by Nathaniel Hawthorne. American Romanticism is a literary period in American Literature that lasted from 1820 to 1865. The movement itself started off as an offshoot of the European Romanticism artistic movement. It arose as a reaction to the formal orthodoxy and Neoclassicism of the preceding period. It is marked by a freedom from the authority, forms, and conventions typical in Neoclassical literature.

It replaced the neoclassic emphasis on reason with its own emphasis on the imagination and emotions, and the neoclassic emphasis on authority with an emphasis on individuality, which places the individual at the center of all life" (Cooper). The American Romanticism movement began after the Revolutionary war ended when America wanted to separate themselves from Britain and the European form of Romanticism. American authors wanted to separate themselves from Britain and Europe because they wanted to be their own country and not looked at like the "little brother" country.

One quote that shows that America wanted independence from Britain and Europe is, "It emerged within the United States after the Revolutionary war when it was connected with the aspiration to forge a distinctive cultural identity correlative with the revolutions unprecedented political and social achievements" (Pease). If it was not for the Romanticism movement in Europe, and Britain, and the Revolutionary war, America would not have had the important American Romanticism literary movement.

Many of the early authors who started the American Romanticism movement had close ties to the European form of Romanticism. There was two generation of American Romanticism authors, the first generation of authors were William Bryant, Henry Headwords, Henry Longfellow, James Cooper, and Catherine Sedgwick. The movement itself is about expressing individuality, emotions, and creativity which caused Americans to write about the American wilderness, science, and other creative ideas that tapped into their heads.

American Romanticism has many major themes, some are highly imaginative and subjective, Emotion intensity, Escapism, common man as the hero, and nature as a refuge or source of knowledge. The second generation of American Romanticism authors were had a few very well known authors that started the movement like Nathaniel Hawthorn, Edgar Allen Poe, Ralph Wald Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller and, and Herman Melville. The authors were to separate themselves from the European movement, " Their representation of the new nation as basically innocent and purged of old world vices"(Pease).

The authors also wrote stories about the conflicts of exploring nature. The second generation of authors wrote short stories, and books about exploring nature, philosophy, and the conflicts of science which made them different than the first generation of authors. Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804 and died in 1864. The famous author as born in Salem Massachusetts into a family whose ancestors were among the earliest of settlers. Hawthorne

was born into a Puritan family, which meant he was raised in a very strict lifestyle.

After Hawthorne's father died in a boating accident, Hawthorne and his mother then moved to Maine to live and work on a farm. "Hawthorne was the son of a sea captain when Nathaniel was four years old" (The Columbia Encyclopedia). When Hawthorne was nine years old, he suffered a severe injury leaving him hurt and immobile for three years, and this is when it was made clear that Hawthorne loved to read and write. Since Hawthorne could not move because of his injury, he started to read and write more, and he decided to become an author.

Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College from 1821, to 1825, and after graduating from Bowdoin College Hawthorne decided to follow his dream to publish and write short stories, and novels. His first story he published was "The Collection Twice-Told Tales", published in 1837, and was found to be liked by Hawthorne, and only Hawthorne. After failing miserably, and having no confidence, Hawthorne got a job at the U. S. Custom house in Boston. Hawthorne only spent two years working at the custom house to save money to move to Brook Farm for six months.

In 1842 Nathaniel Hawthorne married Sophie Peabody who was familiar with Emerson, Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller's writings. The married couple then moved to Concord where Hawthorne wrote "Mosses From the Old Manse," then to Salem where he wrote his best known book, "The Scarlet Letter." In these books Hawthorne started using his own themes and styles of writing. "Set in the 17th Century Puritan New England, the novel delves deeply in the

human heart, presenting the problems of moral evil and guilt through allegory and symbolism.

It is often considered the first American psychological novel. "(The Columbia Encyclopedia) What made Hawthorn's stories beautiful was every character had a different drive to find their destinies than any other stories published in the American Romanticism movement. Many of Hawthorne's short stories showed themes of ironic consequences, and how the desire for perfection can turn out very badly. Hawthorne would start the story off by showing the readers the characters doing something good, but the characters would always end up in bad situations.

A short story that shows irony, and how Hawthorn's characters end up in bad situations is called "The Birthmark." "The Birthmark" is about a scientist named Laymen who decided to leave science for spiritual reasons. "It was not unusual for the love of science to rival the love of a woman" (Hawthorne 215). Laymen persuades a beautiful woman, who all the guys chase, to marry him. While he was married to Georgian, Laymen found the most slightest imperfection on her face, a birthmark annoying and ugly. Georgian was perfect except for the birthmark on her face that resembled a hand.

The birthmark on Georgian's face made Laymen think that she was not perfect, while the rest of the guys thought she was perfect besides the fact she had a birthmark that resembled a hand on her cheek. Laymen wanted to change Georgian's imperfection through science because he wanted to "perfect" his wife. No matter the consequences Laymen wanted to challenge nature with science, and also change the culture. Laymen makes a potion

that Georgian drink that makes the birthmark on her face start to disappear, but as the birthmark starts to disappear Georgian passes away.

Georgian passes away because the birthmark on her face was the only thing that made her human, and peeping her in the human world because perfection cannot be obtained in a human, and without the birthmark on the cheek she was not human anymore. In Alameda addiction for perfection, he lost his beautiful wife, and before he could think twice about what he did, Georgian was dead. This was very ironic because Laymen wanted to do something good by taking away the birthmark on her face, but ends up killing her on accident In American Romanticism some themes included culture of some form, nature, science, or the nature of perfecting something.

Hawthorn's story " The Birthmark" wows how a man tries to perfect nature, but does not realize the consequences there was to trying to perfect something that cannot be perfected. Throughout the story Laymen was obsessing over Georgians birthmark, while other men of the story were saying how perfect she was with the birthmark, " If she were my wife, old never part with that birthmark" (Hawthorne 219). I believethat Hawthorne is trying to say that nothing is made to be perfect, so one should not try to perfect things that should not be perfected.

I feel as though Hawthorne father dying is the reason behind some of the important deaths in his stories. Hawthorne writes about nature because it is something he has been interested in, and was a theme of American Romanticism. Hawthorne showed some other themes in " The Birthmark" like nature, science, the pursuit of perfection. Laymen was a scientist that

wanted to perfect nature, even when more than half of his experiments have failed, he still tried to take the birthmark off of his beautiful wife's cheek.

Laymen strives to get the birthmark off of Georgians cheek so much that he started to have dreams about ripping out her heart because he was obsessing over trying to perfect nature. Throughout the story it wows that Georgian just wanted to please Laymen even though she thought that her birthmark resembled her, and all the guys loved it. Since Laymen started obsessing over the birthmark and hating it, this made Georgian start to hate the birthmark herself too, even though she knows that other men in the world find her birthmark beautiful.

Since Laymen was being selfish and just thinking about himself and perfecting nature he lost love, and his wife Georgian. In "The Birthmark" there is a spot in the story where Laymen obsesses over the birthmark on Georgians cheek so much, that he had a dream where he ripped out her heart, "Laymen now remembered his dream. He had fancied himself with Indaba, attempting an operation for the removal of the birthmark.

But deeper went the knife, the deeper sank the hand, until at length its tiny grasps appeared to have caught a hold of Georgians heart; whence however, her husband was inexorably resolved to cut it or wrench it away'(Hawthorne 217). I feel like this shows that no matter what Laymen did, he needed to take the birthmark off of Georgians face, even if that did mean he would have to take out her heart to do so. What Hawthorne is trying to say in his story is that not one man in the world could perfect nature, and one should not try because no one knows the consequences of doing so.

Nathaniel Hawthorn's story "The Birthmark" showed themes of American Romanticism by showing how culture and nature are different. Hawthorne shows that Laymen wanted to perfect nature, even when nature did not want to be perfected. "The Birthmark" shows how no one can control, and perfect nature without having dire consequences that could end up killing people. You can see how events in Hawthorn's life effected his writing, and how it influenced his publication in the American Romanticism movement.