

Good example of literature review on the birthmark through girards lens

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" is a story of a man and his love for science and his wife, Georgiana. Aylmer, a chemist, has given up his scientific studies to win the heart of a woman he loved. At one stage, the birthmark on his wife's face disturbs him "as being a sign of earthly imperfection" (7). According to him, she becomes an imperfect thing. While trying to remove her mark by using chemical, she dies. His desire to win both love ends up in the rivalry that ruins his life. This story is the best example of Girard's mimetic desire, which leads to the mimetic rivalry, and scapegoat theory. Rene Girard's mimetic theory describes the mimetic nature of the human beings. As Girard rightly says, "the antagonist is caught in an escalation of frustration" (13), and the same situation applies in the story "The Birthmark." This essay deals with the mimetic rivalry and scapegoat motif in "The Birthmark" and how these two theories can be enriched and clarified by Girard's concept and how it relates to its central story of love and aversion for the birthmark between the characters Aylmer and Georgiana. It was a period where the love of science was common. Therefore, as a scientist, Aylmer's love for science is common. His love for Georgiana makes him withdraw from his scientific studies. His desire to unite his two love makes him change Georgiana's birthmark by intervening science. This very attitude of Aylmer proves the power of science in him. His mimetic desire leads to mimetic rivalry between his two love. Both become rivals. They rival each other. Finally, the mimetic rivalry swallows the life of Georgiana. In "The Birthmark," there is a fugitive moment of victory for the image-maker, the one that ends in the destruction of the original. This story is describing both the victory and prejudice. The achievement is scientist's

success in attaining his goal, and prejudice is his hatred for the birthmark on Georgiana's face that becomes an obsession. It is "not unusual for the love of science to rival the love of women in its depth and absorbing energy" (2). According to Girard, a dramatic and a cathartic event have to happen during the human emotional desires. The power of this story domiciles in the two contradictory perspectives of mimesis (desire to prove his power in science and desire to remove the birthmark): the first one that privileges him and the second one that punishes him. In Hawthorne's story, "The Birthmark," when Aylmer succeeds in removing the imperfection in Georgina's cheek, she becomes a perfect thing. She dies. While trying to change the nature for perfection sake, Aylmer destroys the original.

The horrible dream that Aylmer had last night proves that there is a connection between the birthmark and her life. Still, he wants to remove that mark. Georgiana too knows about the consequences of his test. That is why she says, "Removing it could deform my face or damage my health" (2). However, she accepts Aylmer's decision to remove it because she thinks, "Life is not worth living while this hateful mark makes me the object of your horror" (2). To prove her love for her husband, she is ready to risk her life. Aylmer hatred for the mark makes him to go to the extent to not kiss on the cheek where Georgiana has the mark, and he kisses on the other one without the mark. On the other hand, to prove his power of science, he ruined her life.

As Girard rightly says, a serious mimetic rivalry ruins the life of the subject extremely miserable. Georgiana becomes the scapegoat for the mimetic desire of Aylmer. As in Girard's scapegoat theory, by laying the blame on

individual, the violence caused by the mimetic rivalry becomes polarized toward the scapegoat. In this tale, mimetic rivalry between Aylmer's two love arouses the violence in him. The conflict is between Aylmer's science and life. He wants to remove the birthmark from his beloved Georgiana's face because he considers it as an imperfection. He can achieve it by sacrificing the life of his beautiful wife. Georgiana becomes the scapegoat for the experiment of Aylmer. Throughout his life, Aylmer never made any of his experiments successful. Still, he wants to try his experiment with Georgiana that leads her to meet her fatal death. Because of the serious rivalry and the conflict, Georgiana becomes the victim and scapegoat to settle down the conflict between science and life. The mimetic rivalry ends by ruining the life of Aylmer and Georgiana.

In a convenient manner, Girard's mimetic theory is arranged in two parts. One is mimetic desire that ends in mimetic rivalry, and the other is scapegoat motif. In Hawthorne's "The Birthmark," the mimetic desire of Aylmer paves the way for mimetic rivalry, and finally, it ruins the life of Aylmer and Georgiana. "The Birthmark" is a story about a scientist who is not able to accept his wife's tiny flaw. His mimetic desire to remove his wife's birthmark ruins his life and kills his wife. Although Georgiana is depicted as being beautiful, Aylmer wants to change her birthmark. His science works in the end, but at the cost of his beloved wife's life. It is obvious that a serious mimetic rivalry ruins the life of the subject that is life of both Aylmer and Georgiana extremely miserable. "The Birthmark" is a tale of the erasure of imperfection through insistence upon mimesis.