

Analysis of nathaniel hawthorne's the birthmark



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In Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" Georgiana's identity is constructed through gender roles and spiritual aspects. Aylmer, her husband, perceives her physical beauty as almost perfect except for the birthmark on her left cheek, which he believes looks like a tiny crimson hand. Some believed the birthmark to be a hand print from a fairy left as she was born. Men in the past fell deeply for Georgiana; they viewed that birthmark as something beautiful. "Many a desperate swain would have risked life for the privilege of pressing his lips to the mysterious hand" (Hawthorne).

Georgiana has always felt like it was a gift from an angel. Due to her spiritual connection with her birthmark, we see that the author is using religion to aid in constructing her identity. When Aylmer first brings up talk of removing the birthmark, she is appalled at the notion, however, as Aylmer's obsession with removal of the birthmark grows, so does her desire to please her husband. The gender roles of the time are shaping her identity to the extent that she feels compelled to change who she is for the happiness of her husband. Aylmer's obsession with the crimson hand grows so much that he cannot look at her the same way.

Georgiana soon learned to shudder at his gaze" (Hawthorne). She begins to feel so bad about the birthmark that she develops a depressing attitude towards it. At this point, Georgiana will do anything to please her husband and gain his approval. Aylmer has shaped her gender identity of being a good wife and to always please her husband, that she will now stop at nothing to please him, risking even death to make him happy. "Danger is nothing to

me; for life while this hateful mark makes me the object of you horror and disgust,-life is a burden which I would fling down with joy" (Hawthorne).

Georgiana's life is taken in the end because of Aylmer's desire to fix something that he believed was wrong with her. I myself have had identity issues involving gender and spiritual notions. When I was attending classes at a university I began hanging out with someone. At first I thought it was going well and he was really nice but then I started noticing little comments he would make about my physical appearance and my beliefs. At first I thought nothing of it but then I noticed it happening more and more. I was not over weight but not tone by any means either, I walked 5 miles a day and ate relatively healthy.

The first time we went to go swimming and he saw me in my two-piece he looked me up and down in an uncomfortable manner like he was judging me. It was not until later that day when he said " you should probably keep your shirt on so you don't feel uncomfortable around the other girls. " Yeah the other girls were skinny twigs compared to my hour glass figure but I liked who I was. He made me feel bad about myself because I did not look like the stereotypical female figure. After that day I began noticing myself watching what I ate and tried to tone up.

This went on for a couple of months until I realized how he had been constructing my gender identity so that it fit with how he thought I should look. Women's gender identities are constructed by men all the time.

Women always think they need to change how they look so that a guy will like them when in reality it should just be two people liking each other for

who they are. I was not brought up in a house with religion; my parents wanted me to have to choice to pick what I wanted to believe in. I have developed a spiritual, naturalistic, somewhat pagan religious view point.

Since this guy I was seeing was from a strict catholic household he made me feel bad about what I believed in. He said things like " you're a witch" or " that is so dumb, it's all made up. " I stopped doing my rituals which I always loved so much because I wanted to make him happy. This shows how he was trying to develop my religious identity to fit what he thought it should be.

Finally one day I realized that I was fine the way I was and that no one should tell me who I am or shape my identity because it was my own identity to shape.