

# Modern relevance of the birthmark



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Modern Relevance of "The Birthmark" "The Birthmark" is a fable created by Hawthorne that conveys his viewpoint towards the use of science to contradict the laws of nature. The fable also includes commentary on the depiction of men and women in society, along with their presumed roles. Both of these themes in my opinion are even more relevant today than when the story was written. Hawthorne disapproves of science used as a tool to tamper with living beings, for they are not meant to be perfect.

This is illustrated in Georgiana's death after Aylmer attempts to experiment on her: "As the last crimson tint of the birthmark--that sole token of human imperfection--faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere...". The implied moral is that attempting to contradict what is originally intended is unethical and will lead to disastrous results. Hawthorne uses the character Aylmer to exemplify the people who abuse science as a means to control nature.

In modern sciences, "controlling nature" has become the essence of the medical field, progressing to the extreme of cheating death. Hawthorne's opinion is echoed in the controversies today regarding methods such as stem cell research or cloning, as common arguments point to its immorality and the eventual disaster. The story is an exaggeration that was intended to be almost humorous, although I believe Hawthorne must have had the notion that his fear would someday become commonly practiced and even encouraged. "The Birthmark" at a glance might appear to be supporting the stereotypical gender roles of the era. Hawthorne portrays Aylmer as the pragmatic husband and leader, while Georgiana is his complement as the obedient wife. However I believe Hawthorne is using satire to imply just the

opposite. Georgiana is deemed to be Aylmer's intellectual equal; as she was able to read through his experiments and understand his successes and failures.

She also understands Aylmer's greatest flaw, which he himself can never comprehend, and that is his doomed strive for perfection: " With her whole spirit she prayed that, for a single moment, she might satisfy his highest and deepest conception. Longer than one moment she well knew it could not be; for his spirit was ever on the march, ever ascending... requiring something that was beyond the scope of the instant before. " Georgiana's death in the end is the result of her choice to obey Aylmer, even though she knew of his insane obsession and faulty judgement.

I believe Hawthorne is making a statement on the folly of intelligent women bending to the ridiculous whims of their husbands, while they're perfectly capable of making decisions themselves. This theme translates easily for many modern readers who continue to resist the residual expectation of women being subordinate to men. The rigid role of a woman that Georgiana fits into is still recognizable to us, but it is the intelligence and the small streak of independence she possesses that we can relate to. In the end we lament that she did not take a greater stand for herself, as many would have done today.