

# Beauty: the eye of the beholder



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Abstract “ Beauty in things exists merely in the mind which contemplates them. ” David Hume’s *Essays, Moral and Political*, 1742. Beauty: The Eye of the Beholder Beauty is apparent in the moment in time we recognize it. The bases of its perception is not clearly defined by a skeleton pattern, but rather hidden within the recesses of our minds derived from the facades of what we love. Beauty then is the moment of one’s realization. Like most stories and novels by Nathaniel Hawthorne, “ The Birthmark” is an allegory and much of the allegorical meaning is derived through Hawthorne’s use of symbolism. Since Hawthorne is engaged in the telling of a moral tale, it is only fitting that many of the symbols in “ The Birthmark” pertain to deeper allegorical meanings. (Nicole Smith, 2007) Of the many symbols used within this story, Hawthorne’s use of the birthmark symbolically characterizes the sinful imperfections of mankind. Hawthorne mostly likely inherited this understanding from his Puritan ancestors a brooding preoccupation with the idea of Original Sin. (Wikipedia. rg) Another meaning Hawthorne attempts to convey is the power of science (and what happens when science is coupled with arrogance) as well as the message about what occurs when human beings attempt to undermine nature. Interestingly, Aylmer, is obsessed with nature and perfection yet in a vain attempt to create something perfect, he only destroys it. His act of arrogance to change the outward appearance of his wife is in direct opposition to the biblical verse found in the Book of Luke 6: 41-42 “ It’s easy to see a smudge on your neighbor’s face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own.

Do you have the nerve to say, ‘ Let me wash your face for you,’ when your own face is distorted by contempt? It’s this I-know-better-than-you mentality

again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your own part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor. (The Message Bible) The Story The central character of this tale is Aylmer, a scientist who is “ proficient in every branch of natural philosophy. The theme occurs when he marries a beautiful young woman, Georgiana, who possess a birthmark on her cheek in the shape of a tiny crimson hand. Although envious women say “ it spoils her beauty” and most men find it charming. Aylmer becomes obsessed with this mark the one flaw in an otherwise perfect beauty. The more Aylmer begins to outwardly abhor his wife’s birthmark the more she seems to develop abhorrence for it as well. Aylmer then has a prophetic dream in which he seeks surgically to remove the mark, but the dream recedes as he probes till it clutches at her heart.

As a result, Georgiana encourages her husband to attempt removal of the birthmark, even if it should cost her, her life. The fact that Aylmer connects the physical flaw to moral sin seems to be the reason for this abhorrence of the birthmark and thus his justification for, in essence, murdering his wife. This presents a moral ambiguity similar to the situation in “ Young Goodman Brown,” where the Hawthorne carefully suggests that Brown may indeed have met his neighbors and his wife at the devil’s sabbat, but that he may have dreamed the whole episode.

If the evil vision was a dream issuing from the tortured sense of his own guilt, then Brown casts a terrible blight on his wife and neighbors with his imagination. However more so obvious does Aylmer blight his wife as though her physical imperfection (birthmark) were equivalent to sin. In the end,

Georgiana gladly accepts the draft from her husband's hand because of her love and admiration of her husband's intellect and perception of beauty. The birthmark does finally fade, leaving her a vision of perfect beauty, a spirit unblemished in the flesh, but Georgiana is now dead. The birthmark is mortality itself. Enotes. com) Upon conclusion of reading this story, I am able to clearly discern the prejudices, which lie within our perceptions of things. All too often we fail to see the beauty of the forest because of the trees as in the case with Aylmar. Aylmar's overly distraction of the imperfections of his wife's birthmark prevented him from being able to see the essence of her real beauty. His whole concept of beauty was wrapped up in the idea of perfection, which could have never been fully attained by man himself for no man is perfect save God. God is the only true image of perfection.

Throughout this story, I was also reminded of how we as humans of imperfections ourselves desire the ideal perfect mate, unable to find contentment within relationships because of our constant focus on another person's flaws. I can recall vividly how this selfish perception almost destroyed the love that God has so graciously given me. I found it difficult to celebrate the things that were right or good because of my constant focus on what was wrong. During that time in our relationship I was bent on changing him into my idea of the perfect mate, and unless he did things according to that idea I was not satisfied.