

Literature psychological analysis: aylmer in the birthmark



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Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark" is a story laden with allegory, symbolism, and dualisms that primarily center on the life of the brilliant scientist Aylmer. At the onset of the story, Hawthorne presents Aylmer as someone who is a passionate and knowledgeable experimenter. As the story develops, his insecurities are exposed and reveal the bewildering fragile state of the male being. Aylmer is a scientist who believes in perfection to the extent that he expects the same of his wife as this was the only way he would eventually be happy (Mays 219). The main objective of this essay is to analyze the main traits that Aylmer's actions and treats revealed about his psyche in the novel "The Birthmark" and to determine whether the characteristics were unbalanced in any way.

Aylmer was an intellectual who was out of control, or instead, his passion for science might have been getting out of control. His love for science eventually overpowered his sense of decency. As a skilled scientist, he has made incredible discoveries over the years, which primarily relate to the physical world. However, his main challenge is with the spiritual world, which over the years, his research has yielded little results. The more he could not understand the spiritual world, the more he obsessed over it and engaged in research that Aylmer believed would eventually give him the answers he deserved. Although he never actually conducts most of these experiments due to their outlandish nature, he continually states the fact that Aylmer is capable of performing some of the miracles he often spoke of such as giving drinkers eternal life that most people often wanted.

At the beginning of the story, Aylmer is presented to the readers as a man who loves his spouse for everything that she is and everything that she is

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not. Her appreciates her personality, her character and even views the birthmark as something unique that separates her from other women that he might have interacted with in the past. His eugenic and scientific obsession, which were almost nonexistent at the start of the story, is the fundamental driving forces that lead him to obsess over the idea of separating his wife from her flaws. He never stops to consider the possible adverse effects that such a procedure would have on his wife but is mainly centered on his needs and his need for perfection in everything, including his wife. His fixation with the idea of separating one aspect of Georgiana's psych is an indication of the tragic inability of a man to deal with the complexity of being human.

The ultimate tragedy of Aylmer's work is foreshadowed to the readers almost immediately at the beginning of the text with how the narrator describes Aylmer. Hawthorne states " His love for his wife might prove to be stronger of the two, but it could only be by intertwining itself with his love of science and uniting the strength of his love for the latter to its own" (Mays 220). The description makes it evident that Aylmer was a man who was passionate about his work in science, and there was nothing that would likely fascinate him to the same extent. By reiterating the fact that it would be close to impossible to find something that would replace Aylmer's love for science, it becomes evident that anything else that he interacts with in the future would likely be of secondary importance. The description makes it likely that Aylmer's identity was tied to his love for science, which in turn is bound to impact on his relationship with his wife. Such a depiction exposes the innate securities of the male scientist, and subsequently makes it evident to the

readers some of the insecurities that male intellectual scientists might often have to deal with in their line of work.

Georgiana's blemish on her face resembles a small, red hand placed on her left cheek. Throughout her life, most of the people she had interacted with were undecided on whether it was beautiful or ugly. However, Hawthorne states " Georgiana's lovers were wont to say that some fairy at her birth hour had laid her tiny hand upon the infant's cheek and left this impress there in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts" (Mays 220). The statement makes it evident that it might not have been horrifying as Aylmer made it seem. The birthmark possibly holds an equal version of the good and the bad.

On the one hand, it represents her unique nature and positivity, which only a few people in her life ever get to notice and appreciate. On the other hand, the birthmark acts like a physical branding placed on her face. The fact that the blemish is red does not do much to help the situation among those who may view it as a bad thing (Eckstein 511). Aylmer sees it as evil and continually talks of how ugly it is and makes her come off as a damaged or disabled individual.

There is a high likelihood that the increased obsession that Aylmer had with the birthmark on Georgiana's face could have something to do with the fact that it represented an aspect of mortality of life (Eckstein 511). Except for the birthmark on Georgiana's face, the narrator describes her as perfect in every sense, which is how Aylmer viewed her prior to marrying her.

According to the narrator, the birthmark sheds light on the notion that

nothing is perfect in life and flaws exist in everyone and in everything. In the end every living thing will eventually dies in the end. The birthmark of Georgiana was the only flaw in her otherwise perfect body, and yet for some reason, Aylmer could not reconcile with the fact that this was something that was here to stay. His disgust with the blemish indicates his general attitude to how flawed life was and his persistent drive to find ways in which science could eventually fix most of these flaws (Hine and Earnestine 351). He believed that ultimately, the man was capable of having full control over nature, and thus, there was nothing impossible to achieve through science.

Georgiana only ever achieved perfection during her dying moments, according to Aylmer. However, the question is, did Aylmer finally get to meet what he had always wanted? Based on the understanding of what Aylmer always wanted, Aylmer could be argued to have subsequently achieved his motivation. He was a man who loved his work and often took pride in his accomplishments. There is nothing Aylmer loved more than the science and the superiority that it brought for him. “ Thus, his love for Georgiana can only flourish “ by intertwining itself with his love of science, and uniting the strength of the latter to its own” (Lawson 37). Given the fact that he could not fix most of the flaws and inadequacies he had to deal with in life, the most effective way was to fix what he could through science.

The tragedy that becomes of Georgiana’s life could be an indication of the possible outcome that the female gender might often have to deal with due to the fragile male psyche such as in the case of Aylmer. Georgiana had gone through life never viewing the birthmark as an issue until Aylmer mentioned it to her, stating its hideous nature (Eckstein 516). It is from this <https://assignbuster.com/literature-psychological-analysis-aylmer-in-the-birthmark/>

point that Georgiana urges Aylmer to help her get rid of the birthmark because otherwise, she would instead end her life.

The story was first published in 1843 during which the anti-science movement was highly active. Despite the high stigma that existed in the society in regard to certain forms of disabilities, people were still against the idea of scientists imagining that they could take up the role of God and determine what genes were most appropriate for people to have. According to the book, *Marked Body: Domestic Violence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Lawson and Shakinovsky explain, “ The mark, for the narrator, is a sign of Georgiana’s earthliness and therefore implies her true perfection. In all essentials, he is

just like Aylmer and Georgiana; he cannot ultimately grasp the mark’s symbolizing quality, its capacity for multiple significations or play” (33). Aylmer is seeking to reverse what nature has accomplished by using his scientific research to achieve perfection, which ultimately leads to Georgina’s death. Aylmer, as a character, wants to play the character of God, showing his egotistic nature based on the successes he had experienced over the years in his scientific exploration. He insisted on removing the birthmark from his wife’s face even though he was aware of the fact that it came with its risks (Mays 221). He manages to convince Georgiana that the eventual dangers that come with the risk would be worth it in the end as she would finally be the perfect creature he had believed to have married.

Other than being a character in the play, Aylmer could also be argued to be a symbol of the average intellect. By the end of the book, the readers never get to learn about Aylmer's age, habits, childhood, or birthplace. It becomes evident that the main objective of the author might have been to ensure that the readers got a fantastical and nonrealistic view of the character. To some extent, this could be attributed to the fact that the author might have been aiming to present readers with some of the possible adverse effects that come with an independent mind free of morality. Aylmer believed that as a scientist, he was capable of accomplishing anything he wanted and thus never had any limitations to the experiments he wanted to conduct. In the real world, although scientists are free to explore their primary areas of interests, there are values which might constraint them in how far they are willing to go with their experiments. After all, the critical objective of science is not to achieve perfection but rather to improve in areas that one believes that nature might have failed in some way.

Hawthorne effectively singled out a male intellect fixated on the idea of getting rid of a birthmark and living in a society that does not have any coping mechanisms for the members to deal with imperfections. Aylmer describes the birthmark as a "crimson stain upon stain," which somehow brings out his eccentric characterization and to some extent could be a depiction of the male persona (Mays 221). Aylmer is obsessed with achieving the perfection that he is aware is impossible, but still insists on the idea possibly because of his egotistic nature and fragile psyche. The only reason Georgiana gives in to getting the procedure done on her to remove the birthmark is that Aylmer manages to convince her that it is disgusting and

thus making her ugly. Aylmer's dissatisfaction with her flaw grows into a loathing to the extent that he would rather see her die than live with the birthmark for the rest of her life (Mays 221). Eventually, his pursuit of perfection kills his wife, forcing him to reconcile with the idea that maybe it was something that could not be achieved.

Overall, Hawthorne shows the readers the fragile male psyche as depicted by Aylmer's character. Imperfection is a reality that most people have to live with, but Aylmer found it somewhat challenging to live with in the case of his wife. When he married her, Aylmer never minded the fact that Georgiana had the birthmark on the side of her cheek. It is unclear why he eventually took issue with it after their union to the point that he found her somewhat revolting. His obsession with the birthmark could be a reflection of his insecurities and the general fragility of the intellectual male sexual complex.

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