

The birthmark of nathaniel hawthorne

Literature



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The Birthmark of Nathaniel Hawthorne Story “ The Birthmark” tells in modest and little bit romantic tone about a dedicated scientist d Aylmer, who killed his young loving wife when attempting to correct her natural “ imperfection”: a big crimson birth mark on her left cheek, which had shape of human hand-print. Aylmer prepared a brew, which was supposed to remove the birth mark, but, having it drunk, his wife Georgiana died.

Aylmer appears to readers as an ardent, diligent, hard-working and very devoted researcher and book-man, with perfect scientific logic, ideology, spirit, and excellent imagination, who actually loves his science and work even more than he loves his beautiful young wife. He is a good scholar, who reached progress in chemistry, philosophy, psychology and other related subjects. At the same time, he is a mystic alchemist, who possesses divine “ elixir of life” and aspires to perfection in every single thought of his, including his desire to change appearance of his wife.

Georgiana is a young lady, rather beautiful, who loves her husband and feels his affection in response. Spouses live in accordance; they complement each other well, but there is something which slightly puts them into conflict.

Within the time Georgiana’s birthmark becomes an obstacle for them in developing their feelings. For Aylmer it symbolizes natural “ defect”. He becomes obsessed with it and even in his dream he sees himself operating his wife and removing the mark.

Georgiana’s attitude to her birthmark changes during the story. In the beginning of it she does not feel bad about her mark, remembering compliments of her previous lovers, who used to find the hand-shaped beauty spot to be a “ fairy sign” on her face. But seeing that her husband is getting more and more irritated with it, Georgiana herself begins feeling

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disturbed, and then starts strictly disliking her natural mark. That is why she accepts and enjoys the idea of experimental removing it.

In laboratory of Aylmer Georgiana reads his scientific diary and notices that most of his experiments ended with failures. But even this can not stop her, because she has started truly hating her natural “ sign” and wants to get rid of it for any price. Besides, she wants to please her husband and be loved by him again, so she has no other choice except taking the drink he prepared for her.

One more character of the story, servant and Aylmer’s assistant Aminadab, is the main contrast to the scientist. Though these two people work together for long time, they seem to be different in everything. Aminadab is tall, strong, attractive, not very well educated, but always acts correctly by intuition. In the story he says just a few words, but they tell so much about his comprehension of this world. He says that he would never try to remove Georgiana’s birthmark. Aminadab is a perfect “ earthly” opposite of Aylmer. Unfortunately, Georgiana dies and becomes one more failure of Aylmer.

Therefore, he sacrificed his beloved wife for satisfying his own psychological trick, which proved to be the most precious and tragic scientific experiment in his life. Imagining himself to be Pygmalion, Aylmer could not manage to sculpt his woman according to his imagination about perfection. Because, unlikely to our times, it was yet not in power of human being to correct works of nature with the help of alchemy or other development.

I suppose, Hawthorne did not intent to write a pamphlet against science, despite of tragic plot of the story. The idea was to raise a voice against obsession with science, and especially against the attempts to create “ perfect science”. There are many things in our life, which are not perfect,

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and humanity is trying to change them for better with the help of scientific developments and technical progress. But people must not try to change such natural things, like a birthmark on the face. The story of Hawthorne shows how dangerous it can be if science interferes that much with social life.

Bibliography:

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. " The Birthmark," The Celestial Railroad and Other Stories, ed. R. P. Blackmur. New York: Penguin, 1980.