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The Birthmark

American author named, Nathaniel Hawthorne, authored a short story “The Birthmark,” which depicts the obsession of the main character with human perfection. The main character of the short story, Aylmer, who is a philosopher, as well as scientist, gets distracted from his career when he marries Georgiana. She is perfect, except a little birthmark on her face. The husband who has faced a number of failures in his life becomes obsessed with the mark and wants to remove it. Being aware of the stress her husband has to face due to the birthmark, Georgiana allows him to carry out the experimentation of removing the mark. She trusted her husband and wanted to please him, however, his obsession took her life. The obsession of Aylmer with human perfection is depicted through the utilization of literary elements of symbolism, foreshadowing, and irony.

Aylmer's attempt at removing the birthmark of Georgiana is the symbolism of his obsession with human perfection. He had married Georgiana due to his love towards her and at that time, the birthmark on her face had not caused any trouble him. Aylmer is obsessed with human perfection and that is depicted through the symbolism of his attempt to remove the birthmark. He was flustered at the sight of the birthmark, shortly after their marriage and could not accept the fact that Georgiana, who was a perfect woman, had such a great flaw in her beauty. He wanted to make her perfect by removing her birthmark and his attempt symbolized his obsession with human perfection. Another symbolism in the short story is the career break of Aylmer from being a scientist and philosopher to concentrating on removing the flaw from his wife. His obsessions with human perfection are evident from the symbolism that he left everything to make his wife’s appearance perfect. At that point of his life, when he should have focused on progressing his career and ensuring a better future for his wife and the future family, he kept obsessing over the mere birthmark of his wife. The birthmark was the biggest flaw for him, as it made him conscious of the imperfection of his wife (Hawthorne).

Aylmer’s dream of cutting the skin and heart of Georgiana is the foreshadowing of the result of his obsession with human perfection. He was so obsessed with human perfection that the birthmark of his wife started giving him nightmares. He saw in his dream that he was cutting the skin of the birthmark from the face of his wife and that extended to her heart. This is actually the use of foreshadowing to reveal the impact of his obsession. The foreshadowing clearly depicted that the birthmark on the face of Georgiana was attached to her heart, which meant that her life depended on it. Another foreshadowing in the plot of the short story is the fainting of Georgiana after seeing the laboratory of her husband. Instead of being assured of his success and competence, Georgiana became nervous and scared of his laboratory, which foreshadowed her doomed fate. She would have become happy, if she had any confidence in her husband; however, her fainting reveals the lack of trust. The purpose of the whole process was to satisfy the obsession of her husband with human perfection and the author revealed the negative result of the obsessions through the utilization of foreshadowing (Gottesman et al.).

Aylmer’s attempt at removing his wife's birthmark, instead of fixing his failures, is the irony of his obsession with human perfection. The author has used the literary device of irony in the short story by revealing that Aylmer who was obsessed with human perfection had a failed career. He had to face difficulties in establishing his career and was unable to prove his studies and projects. Then instead of focusing his attention on his failures and making the effort of reestablishing it, he focused his attention on removing the flaws of his wife. This is the greatest irony utilized by the author that a person who was a failure in himself, tried to make another human being perfect and took her life in the process. Another irony in the story is utilized by the author is the way that he has depicted Aylmer as an educated and intelligent human being, who had faced failure in life. He was an ordinary, uneducated man, who could not understand the fact that each and every person lacks something in his personality or life. Still, a little mark on the face of his wife made him unapprove, as well as question her beauty and made him obsessed with ensuring her perfection (Hawthorne).

The obsession of Aylmer with human perfection forced him to remove the birthmark of his wife, without caring about the circumstances of his actions. The author has used the literary elements of symbolism, foreshadowing, and irony, in order to present his point effectively. He has shown that a man who was imperfect in his own self tried to make his wife perfect and became the source of her death.

Works Cited

Gottesman, Ronald, et al. *The Norton Anthology of American literature*. WW Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1980.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Birthmark*. Charles River Editors via PublishDrive, 2018.