

COMPARATIVE PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF POE'S "THE OVAL PORTRAIT" AND HAWTHORNE'S "THE BIRTHMARK"

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Abstract : The present study discusses Psychological concepts such as id, Eros, obsession, narcissism, and aggression as they are represented in Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (1843) and Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842). These Dark Romantic works focus on depicting the evilness of human beings as a reaction against Puritan beliefs. The study's main aim is to introduce the similar mentality of male characters in both stories and how their unconscious mind plays a huge role in shaping their reactions. Moreover, it emphasizes how they are controlled by their impulses which lead them to sacrifice their wives for achieving stability. Several Psychological concepts are discussed such as the pleasure principle and obsessive jealousy that reinforce male characters's evilness and aggression. Thereafter, a discussion is raised to answer questions on how obsession and narcissism limit the protagonists' understanding of the horrific situation and indulge them in a defence mechanism against threats. Their lack of awareness and acting on their impulses lead them to realize their fallibility and imperfection.

Keywords: Aggression, defence mechanism, denial, Eros, id, narcissis; obsession, obsessive jealousy, pleasure principle

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1. Introduction

Unlike transcendentalists, Dark romantics such as Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne reflect a pessimistic view of human nature. Their works are a reaction to Puritan and transcendentalist beliefs that focus on the divinity of human beings. Dark romanticism writers wanted to break out from such ideologies and thrive in a field of their own. For this reason, their works usually present the human being as evil, so they rely on themes such as guilt and sin. Because of their opposition to Puritan religious beliefs, they combine the supernatural with darkness to create scepticism about the nature of man (Rathee, 2017, p.86). Moreover, their works are characterized by depicting characters who destroy themselves or get punished because of their fallibility. Poe and Hawthorne are the most prominent writers during this movement as their literary works reflect the evil nature of human beings with references to the themes of guilt and sin. Their depiction of male characters as imperfect and evil serves as the essence of Anti-transcendentalism. Striving to bring about the positive qualities of the human being, male characters usually find themselves repressing their feelings and focusing them inward. As a result, they struggle to separate between the nature of their personalities and what they believe themselves to be.

While different research papers attempt to analyse “The Oval Portrait” and “The Birthmark” in terms of objectifying female characters, others focus on describing the male characters' pursuit of perfection which indicates psychological struggles. These different analyses build on gender roles and how women are being sacrificed because of their submissive nature. Peter Gibian (2011) for example, employs psychological problems in Hawthorne’s “The Birthmark”. One of these problems is obsession. However, his discussion of this work is accompanied by a discussion of Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil”. Although “The Birthmark” and “The Oval Portrait” have been tackled from a psychological lens, few writers addressed the similarities and differences between both works. Thus, the research aims to answer questions on how Aylmer and the artist reflect evil characteristics which leads to a tragic downfall. It attempts to provide a comparative psychoanalytic study between the two works based on Freudian concepts to fill this gap. Hence, it is important to conduct further research to establish further analysis addressing the nature of the psyche of both characters in the literary works.

2. Literary Theory

“The Birthmark” and “The Oval Portrait” have been discussed in different research papers in terms of searching for identity and objectifying women in literature. Other research that has been done tackles different ideas such as symbolism in the literary works in an interdisciplinary framework with psychology. Thereafter, it conducts a comparison with other literary works such as Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil” and Stevenson’s “Olalla”. This section provides a literature review of some of the research that has tackled such themes. For instance, Herin Ratnaningsih (2024) discusses “The Birthmark” from the point of view of defence mechanisms. Ratnaningsih provides analyses on defence mechanisms such as, denial, projection, and repression. Specifically noting how Aylmer and Georgina reflect such aspects based on the Freudian concept of ego. This discussion however is limited and does not tackle themes of narcissism and obsessive jealousy. Benan Orhon on the other hand discusses the theme of gender roles in “The Oval Portrait”. He refers to the lacanian’s view of the term “mirror stage” and indicates that the notion of the “I” stems from being entangled with society and being influenced by society itself which creates the identity of the individual. This literary work is also limited to one concept, significantly addressing the role of ideology and social norms in the story. Although several papers serve to draw comparisons between “The Birthmark” and “The Oval Portrait” along with other literary works such as “Olalla” and “The Ministers Black Veil”, research papers are limited to discussing familiarised concepts such as gender roles, defence mechanisms and ideology. As a

result, little research and comparative psychoanalytic studies are conducted on Poe's "The Oval Portrait" and Hawthorne's "The Birthmark". The purpose of this literature review is to have enough knowledge of what has already been researched. As a result, comparative psychoanalysis between both works is going to be established.

2.1 Hawthorne's "The Birthmark": Symbolism

Symbolism plays a vital role in psychoanalysis. For example, Peter Gibian describes how Hawthorne focuses on symbolism in his literary work "The Birthmark". He indicates that the main character tends to focus on a human aspect (the wife's birthmark) which traps him in a freezing mode. As a result, he acts as if he exists in another world. The character no longer realizes what real life looks like and gets absorbed in his obsessions to fix this flaw. Gibian also emphasises the similarities between "The Birthmark" and "The Minister's Black Veil". He indicates that the veil and the birthmark transform ambiguous signs into symbols. Characters start questioning the meanings of such symbols which completely limits their ability to have social interactions with others. This indicates that aspects such as the veil and the birthmark act as a wall between the characters and other people (2011).

2.2 Poe's "The Oval Portrait": Themes of Supernatural

Seçil Özden and Rüveyde Müge Turhan (2024) on the other hand discuss "The Oval Portrait" in comparison with "Olalla". Their discussion builds on the clash between supernatural and natural themes. It indicates how this literary work is different in terms of its narrative which is considered gothic in nature. They focus on addressing the gap between reality and illusion in both works. Their research is marked by highlighting the theme of the uncanny in these gothic literary works. Moreover, they build on Freudian psychoanalysis of fear. The uncanniness involves portraits, deserted castles, and ghosts. This idea creates a bridge between the supernatural and the natural. Özden and Turhan suggest that this theme challenges traditional narratives and plays a vital role in understanding the reactions of the characters. Based on Freudian ideologies, they emphasise that these fears develop as a result of being acquainted with it rather than being estranged because of it. When the characters keep thinking about these uncanny ideas, they are engraved in their memory. Thus, constant thinking creates a sense of fear that disturbs their sense of well-being.

2.3 Psychological Fusion

Robert N. Mollinger (1979) analyses "The Oval Portrait" in terms of the multiple identities found in the story. These identities include the identity of the artist, the narrator, and the woman in the painting. This combination reflects a psychological fusion as the identity in the painting embodies the wounded narrator. Mollinger claims that this fusion is related to the relationship between the infant and the mother. In other words, the child is not separate from the mother. Mollinger also explains the unconscious concepts by drawing on Marie Bonaparte's reproduction of "The Oval Portrait". The woman in the reproduced work is Poe's mother. The fact that Poe lost his mother when he was a child, suggests that he needs to be infused with a mother figure which is preserved through the portrait. For this reason, the different identities of the narrator, the portrait, the artist, and Poe are all fused. Mollinger concludes that through this biographical interpretation, art destroys and preserves life at the same time.

The purpose of this research is to psychoanalyze the mentality of male characters in Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" and Poe's "The Oval Portrait". Their motivations and desires are discussed and analysed in terms of Freudian concepts such as id, pleasure principle, obsessive jealousy, obsession, Eros, and narcissism. According to Freud, Id is the voice that is born with you as a child. It follows the pleasure principle and maintains your ability to do things without considering their consequences. You do things as long as they make you satisfied regardless of

your awareness of them being good or bad. Obsession is another term that can be defined as being preoccupied with unreasonable things which lead man to indulge in unpleasant situations. Obsessive jealousy is one type of obsession. People who are diagnosed with obsessive jealousy develop a belief that everyone is trying to harm them and that their partners are unfaithful or never trustworthy (Batinic et al., 2013). They no longer trust others and fall into defence mechanism where their actions turn into violence. Narcissism, on the other hand, is believing in your abilities and power to the extreme. "On Narcissism" by Sigmund Freud discusses grandiosity, idealization of the self, and self-love. He establishes a link between these three themes and indicates their centrality to narcissism (1914). Narcissists usually believe in their potential to transcend earthly forces which leads them to self-destruction. Another term used to psychoanalyze characters is Eros or the life instinct. It maintains that characters are willing to do anything to live or have a second chance in life to satisfy their desires and end their stress. Both Poe's and Hawthorne's male protagonists go through a disturbed mental journey as they try to pursue their artistic creations and end up sacrificing their wives to achieve mental stability. While both writers reflect characteristics of dark romanticism, their production of such stories is influenced by their upbringing. Ingram (1887) and Meltzer (2003) delve into their life experiences which highlights their struggle of losing loved ones.

3. Poe's Life

Poe had an alcoholic father who deserted him when he was an infant and died of consumption. Thereafter, his mother was forced to raise him and his sister alone. Managing to raise her three children and complete her work and duties as an actress was a struggle and soon after her Husband's death, she died from tuberculosis (Ingram, 1887, p.6). After the death of his mother, Poe suffered tremendously as he was raised by his foster parents. His stepfather Allan looked down on him and thought that he did not deserve to be his son. When Poe went to university Mr. Allan did not support him financially which engaged Poe in gambling and alcoholism. Hence, he suffered from extreme poverty and was in debt. Although he looked for "motherly warmth" throughout his relationship with his foster mother (Francis), history repeated itself when she was diagnosed with the same disease as his biological mother. The death of his foster mother destroyed the connection between him and his foster father and worsened the situation. When he tried to escape this struggle through drinking and gambling, Mr. Allan decided to disown him. Not long after the death of his foster mother, he witnessed the tragic death of his friend's mother who consoled him when he was at his lowest and that made him suffer even more. He felt tormented and the idea of death and decay made him extremely terrified (Meltzer, 2003, p. 27). Knowing that he had no one to rely on after the death of his mother, during his teenage years, he grew interested in Elmira Royster. He wrote letters to her yet never got a reply. He later realized that her father disapproved of their relationship and destroyed all his letters without Elmira's Knowledge (Meltzer, 2003, p.36). His love life was bad and his bad luck followed him even throughout his marriage. After the loss of his wife Virginia, he sought refuge through alcoholism. Her death made him desperate and depressed, for he loved her dearly (Ahmad, 2020, p.285). The death of different women in his life and his disappointment with Elmira influenced and shaped the writing of his literary works which can be seen in his short story "The Oval Portrait". Poe created his works as a reaction to his grief and feeling of loss. His works aim to open a window for him separate from the real world where he experiences pain. Thus, he depicts characters who believe in an imaginary world that helps them overcome their fear of abandonment. Mai Ahmad (2020) emphasizes that Poe thinks of death as an outlet that delves into a happier experience where he is with his beloved ones (p.283). His stories become a way to revive his loved ones.

4. Hawthorne's Life

Similar to Poe, Hawthorne spent his life surrounded by women after the death of his father. As a widow, Hawthorne's mother rarely left her room. She spent her time in isolation which caused him to seek guidance from his two sisters. "His older sister, Elizabeth, said that Nathaniel was 'the special pet of all' in the Manning household" (Meltzer, 2003, pp.20-25). This is because he suffered from frequent illnesses and broke his leg which forced him to use crutches for more than a year. Taking into account his suffering, he spent most of his time daydreaming and reading. Hawthorne's happiest moments in life are the moments he spent with his mother and two sisters, however, everything changes when he has to leave them to study (Meltzer, 2003, pp.20-25). Hawthorne struggled to preserve his relationship with his mother and sisters. Since he was reliant on them, leaving for study influenced him and created change in his life. As a result, he tried to preserve his loved ones through the reflection of his male character's attachment to his wife as an important component of the literary short story "The Birthmark".

5. The Purpose of their Writing

Both writers suffered from losses in their lives and were raised by women characters. The nature of their works is driven by their desperate need to preserve their loved ones. The death of Poe's foster mother contributes to his ideologies about the depiction of beautiful women in his works. The nature of his romanticized works such as "The Oval Portrait" emphasizes the fragility of Women who are often caring, submissive, and would sacrifice for the artistic creations of their husbands. His works place a huge emphasis on the notion of death especially after the death of his wife Virginia which stimulates his psychological concepts about the meaning of death and its effects (Dean and Boyd, 2021, p.3). Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" similarly contributes to the idea of death and sacrifice. He depicts women as objectified by men who attempt to satisfy their ego and find ways to relieve stress. Thus, writing serves as a window to the authors' lives and provides an expression of their grief at losing important women. In "The Birthmark", Hawthorne represents self-independent confident women and reflects ideas of gender and power relative to the pleasure principle in which men lack awareness of the consequences of irrational thinking. Poe on the contrary, reflects the sacrifice of women and their submissive nature. He is best known for his description of beautiful women and the theory of "Death" in so many of his works. Through relying on the theory of death Poe believes that melancholy is best described by the idea of death and that the combination of death and beauty contributes to the uniqueness of his works (Xiaobin, 2014, p. 176). His characters usually live happily at the beginning, however, they are punished at the end for being against reason. Thus, their death takes different forms such as murder, suicide, and disease. Diseases are attributed to beautiful women in his stories. Since he loved and idealized many women in his life, dying because of a disease, serves as a reflection of the limitations of beauty against the powerful nature. When a woman suffers from a disease, her beauty fades quickly and she grows in age (Xiaobin, 2014, p.177). Poe's method of representing the death of female characters because of a disease is influenced by his real-life relationships as most of the important women in his life died because of tuberculosis. As a result of continuous grief, Poe and Hawthorne attempt to address mental disabilities resulting from a realization of the bitter reality of death. This leads them to enter a cyclical loop of denial which later transforms into evil reactions to preserve loved ones through art. "The Birthmark" and "The Oval Portrait" describe psychological problems such as evilness, narcissism, obsession, and denial as both male characters have to choose between female companions or their art.

6. An Insight into Aylmer's Personality

What characterizes Poe's "The Oval Portrait" and Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" is their emphasis on denial of death and reality. One can see that both works describe the fear of mortality as a dilemma that characters are struggling to accept. In "The Denial of Death" (1973) Ernest

Becker claims that "The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity (ix)." This mainstream of ideas suggests that the behaviour of male characters in both stories is derived from their unconscious which plays a vital role in changing their conscious mind. To be more specific, the unconscious mind is where most of the thought process happens which suggests that every feeling and thought will influence the way we react to things. Aylmer the scientist for example is devoted to his experiments and strives to accomplish his goals especially when it comes to convincing his wife of extracting the birthmark. Furthermore, his seclusion in the laboratory for years reinforces his anxiety of mortality as he realizes that he enclosed himself from his wife for the sake of his experiments and discoveries. "He had devoted himself, however, too unreservedly to scientific studies" and "became obsessed with anything scientific" (Hawthorne, 1843, p. 5).

The protagonist strives to transcend earthly nature through his scientific abilities as a result of existential problems which are the result of isolating himself from his wife. Aylmer spends most of his time in his laboratory, and when he sees his wife, he starts detecting her flaws. His engagement with science makes him see things he never thought of before for the sake of achieving perfection. Once he notices the birthmark, it seems as if he realizes that his time with his wife is limited. As a result, he associates it with decay, death, and sin. All his accomplishments that were admired by those around him are challenged when he tries to find ways to eliminate the birthmark. Hence, he is depicted as a disillusioned character who is influenced by the power of nature which seems to transcend his abilities and the power of science (Tritt, 2008). This is when the reader starts realizing the nature of Aylmer's narcissistic traits. His desire to eliminate the flaw on his wife's face as he proposes, is by means a way to satisfy his id. Aylmer cannot satisfy his desires, so he often considers other men as rivals who are capable of winning Georgina's heart which is responsible for shaping his psyche. This dissatisfaction is thus a part of his unconscious mind that makes him act on his impulses. As a result, his actions are produced without any consideration of bad outcomes.

Maria Kli (2018) indicates that "in Eros's most intense state, the boundary between the "I" and the object tends to be eliminated" (p.70). Eros is the life instinct that Aylmer has. By extracting the birthmark, he attempts to preserve his mind by giving himself another chance to live with his wife. However, this energy is directed into his wife as a form of aggression and violence. This suggests that Aylmer's desire to preserve his wife is suppressed and plays a vital role in increasing his anxiety. For this reason, he wants to eliminate the birthmark that represents his suppressed desires and needs. His paranoia controls his actions because his feelings are directed inward. Hence, he acts unknowingly and pushes his aggression outward as he convinces Georgina of the elimination process. When she confronts him on whether he can eliminate it, he replies with "doubt not my power" (Hawthorne, 1843, p. 9). He gives it all his attention and believes he is capable of doing it. In other words, the idea haunts his mind. With denial of reality, he tries to please himself through his experiments to remove the birthmark without considering the consequences of his actions.

Based on Freudian concepts, Aylmer's id is driven by his desire to have complete perfection and satisfaction which is driven by the pleasure principle. Since his erotic desire is repressed, Aylmer's unconsciousness is overloaded which stimulates his death instinct. When there is no satisfaction, he tries to find ways to relieve stress. This whole process is accomplished through the death of his wife and the disappearance of the birthmark. In other words, if the object no longer exists his anxiety will be reduced. Illogical thinking of the situation resulting from his desire plays a vital role in achieving a sense of evilness as a result of his obsession with science. Hence, the situation turns upside down when he kills his wife during the procedure. One sign of this obsession is repeating the word "thought" two times as he is asking Georgina not to doubt his power. He insists on giving the birthmark his whole attention which highlights his irrational

obsession with it. Another sign of obsession and violence is shown through his dream. Aylmer “had fancied himself with his servant Aminadab, attempting an operation of removing the birthmark” (Hawthorne, 1843, p. 8). His thought about the process of elimination takes over his unconscious mind as he dreams about performing the surgery. However, it turns into violence as he reaches his wife’s heart and kills her. In her essay, Sarah David analyses “The Birthmark” from the point of view of Jaques Lacan who is known for his examination of Psychology in relationship to language. When examining psychological concepts, having a stable language is crucial for separating one’s self from others. According to Lacan, this can be accomplished unless a gap is created and confusion is evident. Following this principle, Aylmer is found struggling to separate his love for science and his wife. This occurrence of confusion leads Aylmer to question the signifier of the birthmark and shapes his desire to accomplish unity. Moreover, people around him seem to contradict his opinion about the birthmark. While he considers it as a sign of death, others look at it as a sign of beauty, which raises his anxiety and makes him torn and separated. Since Aylmer is different from other men regarding his beliefs about the birthmark, he is not able to possess the qualities of a good husband. He rather seems entitled to science only. The nature of his personality is shown when he is compared with his servant Aminadab. When Aylmer’s wife faints, he calls his servant to help him which means he is dependent on others. The servant then replies with “If she were my wife, I’d never part with that birthmark” which suggests that he has the characteristics of a good man who would be responsible for his wife. While Aylmer thinks about his experiments, the servant seems to be the complete opposite of him because of his logical thinking. As a result of this realization, Aylmer is forced to look for means of unity and stabilization. However, it can be achieved only through establishing unity between science and his love for Georgina.

The more time Aylmer spends with his wife, the more he realizes her signs of growing in age. In the story it is noted that:

It was not unusual for the love of science to compete with the love of a woman. The scientist's name was Aylmer. He had so totally given himself to scientific studies that he could not be weakened by a second love. His love for his young wife could only be the strongest of the two if it could link itself with his love of science. Such a union did take place with truly remarkable results. But one day, very soon after their marriage, Aylmer looked at his wife with a troubled expression (Hawthorne, 1943, p. 5).

Dealing with experiments is the meaning behind his life because with these experiments flaws are detected and healed. Leaving his scientific discoveries forces him to accept his wife with all her flaws and liability of death. For this reason, he cannot sacrifice science for his wife. However, if Aylmer’s love for science is unified with his love for his wife, then surely his love for Georgina will be stronger. Since he spends most of his time in the laboratory and devotes himself to scientific discoveries, his love for Georgina weakens him. In other words, looking at Georgina’s face reminds him of his failure to win her heart, his inability to be with her, and his failed discoveries. In other words, science is his salvation from this conflict.

7. Poe’s Depiction of Male Characters

Poe similarly manifests psychological concepts such as obsession through his representations of male characters in “The Oval Portrait”. His story also reflects his need for a mother figure in his life through the preservation of the woman in the story. Moreover, one can see how the painter is also driven by the pleasure principle as the narrator describes him as “passionate, studious, austere, and having already a bride in his Art” (Poe, 1842, p.483). The painter gives no scope to rational thinking and ends up losing his wife in the process as he becomes obsessed with art at the expense of her life. He fails to notice that his wife is suffering and hurting throughout the painting process. This description highlights that the husband isolated himself from reality, his

wife, and the outer world because he was occupied with art (Bellin, 2017, p. 4). Nevertheless, art and reality clash together as they are seen in a parasitic relationship. In other words, art feeds on reality and devours every aspect of it. Trapping the woman inside a frame is a process of dehumanizing her. Her life is taken away by art and preserved in the frame. The husband is obsessed with his artistic creation and does not even consider his wife's struggle to remain positioned while he paints her. "He would not see that the light which fell so ghastly in that lone turret withered the health and the spirits of his bride, who pined visibly to all but him" (Poe, 1842, p. 483). Similar to Aylmer, the husband favours his art over his wife. His obsession with it prevents him from seeing the obvious and shows how selfish he is. Although Poe's protagonist is driven because of art and imagination, Hawthorne's Protagonist is driven by what he thinks is reason and reflect his scientific abilities. However, they share the same motivation and their similar actions make them kill their wives because of their selfishness and narcissism. His brush sucked the life out of her and made her pale. Throughout the story, Poe does not only represent the evil mentality through the husband's character, but he also manifests it through his description of the narrator. When the narrator encounters the portrait, he indicates that he is in a state of delirium "In these paintings my incipient delirium" (Poe, 1842, p. 481). He is unable to think clearly and his imagination is disturbed as he is filled with curiosity to learn more about the paintings around him. As a result of the powerful representation of the female figure, he shuts his eyes when he first sees the painting and tries to maintain his feelings of what he just witnessed. "I had found the spell of the picture in an absolute life-likeness of expression, which at first startling, finally confounded, subdued and appalled me" (Poe, 1842, p. 482). What makes him shocked and appalled is the gaze of the lady, which suggests that the aesthetic gaze of the life-like painting overlaps with the gaze of the narrator in reality. To explain this more, by looking at the painting, the narrator senses that his power is being challenged so he stops to maintain the lady in the painting. Through the narrator's account, it can be identified that the painter-husband wants to objectify his wife and impose power over her. Eros is discussed once again as it plays a vital role in this story. The painter's wife is seen as his other part and his views on her are shaped by society. He draws his wife the way he wants her to look like, and does not include a whole portrait. When providing a portrait of the head and shoulders, the painter seems to draw the viewer's attention as he raises their curiosity on what she looks like fully portrayed. He wants to transform her attractive beauty into the frame so he does not lose this pleasure when looking at her. He is afraid that once she is gone, he will not be able to preserve her look which makes him unaware of her suffering. Because of his desire, he looks for means to satisfy his id which can be seen through his artistic passion. The painter "had grown wild with the ardour of his work, and turned his eyes from the canvas rarely" (Poe, 1842, p. 483). His evilness stems from his obsession with art. These lines suggest that he memorizes every detail about his wife because he fancies her. However, obsession and narcissism lead him to dehumanise her and consider her less a human and more like an animal. His repressed love for her is let out in a form of aggression and violence which are generated from his need to preserve her image. Poe allows readers to understand that male figures strive to impose their dominance on women through the process of gazing. While men gaze at the beautiful lady because they desire to look at her, her gaze overpowers them because of how real it looks. Although the woman in the painting possesses power over the gaze of men, the woman in the volume is "humble and obedient". She is submissive and captive. Thus, the narrator shifts his gaze and defends himself by looking at the guidebook instead. While Aylmer's id stems from his desire to transcend nature, the id of the painter in Poe's story stems from his desire to gain dominance and control over his wife. By insisting on drawing his wife, the artist articulates vampire traits as he causes his wife's illness and sucks the life out of her to bring his art to life. "He grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a loud voice 'This is indeed Life itself!' turned suddenly to regard his beloved:-She was dead" (Poe, 1842, p. 484). His gaze at the end is not an objectifying one, but rather an emotional one that indicates his guilt. This

emphasises his realization of his failure to preserve his wife and his inability to transcend nature. Repressed feelings and too much obsession kills his wife.

8. Defence mechanism in “The Birthmark”

In the birthmark, Aylmer the protagonist falls into a defence mechanism. He imposes a combination of hatred and love. However, his emotions are separate. His love for his wife does not prevent him from fixing what he hates about her. Georgina tells Aylmer that most men find her birthmark attractive and he replies with "Ah, upon another face perhaps it might," "but never on yours" (Hawthorne, 1843, p. 5). His words convey how disgusted he is because of the birthmark. This disgust could be because of being jealous of other men who find his wife beautiful. He wishes and works hard to take it off because he holds control over her. She is his and will never be someone else's and to convince her he describes it as "earthly imperfection." Aylmer never thinks of Georgina as imperfect at the beginning. However, the more he stares at her face, he realizes that she is beautiful, but the birthmark is a defect. The thought of losing her reinforces his fear and anxiety. He is scared because of his inability to fulfil her needs and be the ideal representation of a man. Thus, the birthmark represents her "liability to sin" which means she is capable of leaving him. As a result of his fear of abandonment, he gets trapped by his obsessive jealousy and paranoia. Batinic et al. (2013) describe obsessive jealousy as something that makes people afraid of losing a partner and thinking they will be unfaithful (p.335). Aylmer's delusions encapsulate negative associations with the birthmark. Thereafter, obsessive jealousy makes him believe that his wife is unfaithful even though he has no evidence of it. "I know not what may be the cost to both of us to rid me of this fatal birthmark. Perhaps its removal may cause cureless deformity; or it may be the stain goes as deep as life itself (Hawthorne, 1843, p. 8). This suggests that Aylmer is unconsciously trying to disfigure Georgina's face. His continuous thought about the birthmark places pressure on his ability to live. This affects his unconscious mind and leads to acting intrusively without realizing he is doing so. He misrepresents reality and becomes obsessive over his wife which leads him to experiment on her. As a result of fear, he kills her. Imagining what the birthmark could do if it is not abstracted plays on the wilderness of his imagination. Thus, he gets paranoid whenever he sees her and fears looking at her birthmark because it is "causing him more trouble and horror than ever Georgiana's beauty" (Hawthorne, 1843, p.7). His fear and anxiety encapsulate and impose into his consciousness. They are let out through a nightmare that Georgina is aware he has. When she reminds him of it, he recalls attempting to remove it with his servant. However, the deeper his knife goes, the birthmark sinks and he catches his wife's heart. Destiny Casson (2023) indicates that the birthmark is connected to Georgina's life. Hence, it serves as a source of life for her (p.2). The dream emphasises that the heart symbolises life and is inseparable to the birthmark which means that Aylmer's suffering will not end unless Georgina dies. His fear of the birthmark takes over his imagination and makes him think of practicing violence to remove his stress. Georgina knows that he does not trust her. This is highlighted when he "rushed towards her and seized her arm with a gripe that left the print of his fingers upon it" (Hawthorne, 1843, p.16). Seeing her watching them in the laboratory is a threat, so he imposes aggression on her. Through the lines one can see his anger, however, when she confronts him with his feelings for her, he engages in a defence mechanism and speaks in a sweeter manner. This shift from being angry at her to describing her as his "noble wife" creates a form of distraction from reality. In other words, he keeps reformatting his reactions and switching them to safer ones so she does not interfere with his scientific ambitions.

9. Defence Mechanism in “The Oval Portrait”

Similar to Aylmer, the man in the oval portrait, also falls into a defence mechanism. The man gets appalled and scared when looking at the portrait which forces him to escape the woman's gaze. The woman being trapped inside of a frame suggests that she is controlled. Thus, the

narrator represents gender roles throughout the gazing process. Men are supposed to be in control over women, however, the lifelikeness of the portrait makes him doubt his ability to gaze at her. “With deep and reverent awe” he “replaced the candelabrum in its former position” (Poe, 1842, p. 482). This defensive act of placing the candelabrum in front of the portrait, suggests that the gaze of the woman makes him anxious and highlights his low self-esteem. This is why looking at the volume where the woman seems captive and submissive makes him more comfortable because it enables him to maintain his power. His insecurity when he gazes at her drives him to open the volume because he is interested in her.

10. Symbols in “The Birthmark”

Throughout both stories, one can see many symbols. For example, the birthmark acts as a symbol of Georgina’s imperfections. Describing it as “crimson” means that it is red with a little purplish colour to it. Igor Tolochin and Anna Tkach (2018) indicate that it “is perceived as potentially dangerous and destructive” (p.30). When considering the red colour, it might represent dominance and power, however, it can be viewed as a symbol of sacrifice. In his article, *Crimson and Scarlet: the Importance of Colours in the Bible*, Rev'd Martin Wheadon indicates that “Crimson” is a symbol of sacrifice in the bible. Aylmer’s wife “could not help see that many of his experiments had ended in failure. She decided to see for herself the scientist at work.” Aylmer sacrifices his wife to overcome his fear and anxiety and prove himself right because he failed in many experiments. To be more specific, when other men such as Aminadab look at Georgina, they are attracted to her because of the crimson birthmark. This suggests that other men are more capable of winning Georgina in comparison to Aylmer. He describes it as crimson and associates it with negative actions because he believes that she is going to leave him if she desires to. The birthmark acts as a source of power to her which makes him scared. Moreover, it could also be a symbol of desire and passion. Aylmer might not even hate the birthmark. In other words, he loves his wife, but since it is an attractive quality of hers, he is repressed from accepting her flaw. If he does not extract it, other men will still be attracted to her. The death of his wife after removing the birthmark suggests that its removal made Georgina too perfect for this world, making him draw a conclusion that her flaw is normal and nothing is supposed to be perfect. “You have rejected the best the earth could offer. Aylmer, dearest Aylmer, I am dying!” (Hawthorne, 1843, p. 19).

11. Conclusion

In general, both stories discuss the power of art as the main theme. Art is the rival of female characters in both stories and male obsession with art contributes to their evilness and irrational thinking. The experiment and painting process turn into murder in both narratives which indicates vampire traits in male characters. Although the female figure in Poe’s story holds power over men as she is trapped in the portrait, the female in Hawthorne’s story is submissive like the woman in the volume. Poe and Hawthorne reflect on their grief of losing important women in their lives through the depiction of male characters who lost their wives because of their own imperfections. Both the oval portrait and the birthmark depict characters who lose touch with reality and generate obsessions from within themselves as a reaction to different conflicts that happen in their unconscious mind. In this sense, conflicts such as separating between their love for art and their wives to establish unity and achieve dominance make them lose to the power of nature.

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