

“The Birthmark,” the Coronavirus and the War against Nature

The war against nature is misguided and pursues unrealistic goals. “The Birthmark,” by Nathaniel Hawthorne mentions the unfeasible pursuits of ‘beauty’ and ‘hygiene.’ Similarities between “The Birthmark” and our society include, Aylmer’s concoction for Georgiana that led to her death, Bill Gates’ goal of vaccinating everyone, Georgiana removing her birthmark due to Aylmer’s insistence, insecure people who feel the need to get plastic surgery, Aylmer’s fear and misunderstanding of nature, our fear and misunderstanding of COVID-19, Amindab’s harmonization with nature and the small minority of people who understand life and the truth behind corrupt governments.

Aylmer makes a concoction for Georgiana that eventually kills her. Essentially, the ignorance of Aylmer is responsible for damaging Georgiana’s health and later her immune system. The ingredients used to make Georgiana’s strong medication is unknown, but the substances have a strong cleansing effect. However, the ability to cleanse does not mean it is safe for our bodies. Likewise, Bill Gates dreams of giving people “high-tech” vaccines that could result in many deaths. COVID-19 has drawn more awareness to hygiene. However, our lifestyle is a leading reason to us succumbing to illnesses. Our health is slowly deteriorating with the use of chemical additives in our food, the stress society puts on us from a young age, the lack of contact we have with nature and the need to vaccinate ourselves. Beyond the dead pathogenic cells, we are unaware of the ingredients in vaccines. Our solutions to hygienic problems should not be to vaccinate, but to live in a clean environment with unaltered foods. Moreover, living in harmony with nature has shown nothing but benefits: natural resources are vital to sustaining life, outdoor exercise helps you harness vitamin D, nature-made water sources are self replenishing, all trees exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen, specific herbs have healing properties, and so on.

Aylmer insists Georgiana remove her birthmark. Due to consistent pressure, Georgiana agrees and sees her birthmark as a flaw in her beauty. She begins to feel anguished because of her birthmark. She is constantly reminded that it is a “stain,” a “defect,” and an “imperfection.” Subsequently, Georgiana dies from Aylmer’s treatment. Similarly, society’s beauty standards compel people to undergo surgery. As a result, more kids nowadays are feeling inclined to also undergo surgery. Children face bullying due to their outer differences. Henceforth, they begin to hate the way they look and everyday living becomes arduous. In the end, people get addicted to the ability of doctors to alter their bodies; consequently, they die from complications.

Aylmer’s health problems stem from his self-imposed isolation. His isolation is damaging to his mental health and preventing his contact with nature. He is deficient in immunity, which long walks in nature can help improve. Similarly, placing people in lockdown is showing more negative results. Lockdown harms our wellness; people are isolating themselves from nature and losing out on a natural source of vital vitamins. As a matter of fact, people in quarantine are not taking vitamins that will help make up for their lack of exposure to nature.

Before lockdown, many people lived a similar lifestyle to lockdown. We all stayed at home, went to work, attended school and participated in extracurriculars, but did our lifestyle allow us to spend time in nature? No. We were busy improving our studies for our career, not busy improving our health for a long, healthy life. Likewise, Aylmer is obsessed with his job. He craves the glory of attention. He likes to discover new things that will boost his ego as a scientist and inventor.

In Hawthorne’s story, the ‘cure’ is deadlier than the problem. Likewise, according to many analysts, doctors included, the world’s response to COVID-19 has been more damaging than COVID-19. Many people are unable to support themselves financially anymore. With the loss of their financial stability comes the fluctuation of their access to “free” healthcare and food. We crave the security provided by government services.

“The Birthmark” describes Aminadab as having an “earthiness that incrusts him.” Moreover, Aminadab is shown to be connected to and accepting of nature: “If [Georgiana] were [Aminadab’s] wife, [he]’d never part with that birthmark.” Aminadab represents the small minority of people who live their life knowing the government is corrupted and that “high-tech” vaccines are not effective at fighting disease. In addition, these people are the ones who know how to live peacefully with nature: farming crops, gardening plants, growing herbs, accepting oneself, etc.

To conclude, “The Birthmark” described problems evident in our society: heavy reliance on experts, strong focus on our vanity, and ignorance of the truth behind our everyday lives. Avoiding and destroying nature will do more harm and no good for society. Rather than pursue these unrealistic goals, we should learn to live in harmony with nature.