

## Color Symbolism: How Organic Unity Is Achieved in Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux"

Commented [B1]: lowercase

As literary contemporaries of the nineteenth century, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe transported the European gothic genre into American writing—Poe through imitating the supernatural elements of the genre and Hawthorne through illuminating the dark and sinister side of human nature. Poe, himself, is considered a father of American short stories due to the literary components he implements in his stories, including organic unity. Poe uses organic unity, the intentional use of all aesthetic elements, in order to create his desired effect of a gothic eeriness. Hawthorne utilizes organic unity, as well, in his short story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." He employs the element of color symbolism when describing the characters in order to convey a gothic tone of the internal evil and imperfections of man.

Commented [B2]: Poe did that too... did Hawthorne do it as well?

Commented [B3]: Rather than 'including' I would say something like 'specifically' because this is what you're focusing on

Hawthorne's use of the color grey in his descriptions of the characters of "My Kinsman" gives insight into the fickle nature of man. When Robin finally finds his kinsman, Major Molineux, in his humbled state, he witnesses "the foul disgrace of a head that had grown grey in honor" (618). Here grey hair is a symbol of the honor that comes through age and maturity. Though Molineux possesses this feature—this symbol of honor given to elderly men—he is anything but honored. This situation is ironic in that his grey head is being shamed and disgraced. The due respect that should be given to him as an elderly man—and also as a royally commissioned leader—is instead denied by the townspeople. An old citizen whom Robin runs into on a few occasions also bears this symbol of honor. He wears a "grey periwig" which he exchanges for a nightcap in the scene in which Molineux is run out of town (618). Rather than being stripped of honor as Molineux, the old citizen voluntarily takes off his wig, relinquishing his rights to honor. Perhaps he does this in fear to avoid the same fate as Molineux. The color

Commented [B4]: Something about this sentence is unsettling to me. I just don't like it. The 'as well' really throws me off. Maybe something like, "In his short story, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" Nathaniel Hawthorne also utilizes this idea of organic unity"

Commented [E5]: How is the flow in this paragraph? Should I nix Poe or keep him in to introduce organic unity?

Commented [B6R5]: Well, I'd keep it in because Poe did invent the idea of organic unity and it seems to be a really great way to introduce the thought of it

Commented [B7]: Is there anything specifically shaming it? Or are we assuming that the reader has an operating knowledge of the story (which I clearly don't)?

Commented [B8]: Just a thought – you use these two lines up and normally it's nice to space it out a bit since they are so very eye catching

Commented [B9]: I would personally say something like 'out of fear and a desire to avoid Molineux's fate' but that is just so my preference

grey shows the fickle nature of man in man's inconsistency to presenting and holding of honor.

Who man once honored he later tars and feathers, and who once held honor willingly forsakes it.

The color white in "My Kinsman" bears the meaning of purity. The first appearance of white in a description of a character occurs in the inn scene when the innkeeper is described as "a little man in a stained white apron" (610). The "stained" white of his apron parallels the description of Georgiana's face in "The Birth-Mark," another of Hawthorne's short stories. Georgiana has a "visible mark of earthly imperfection" on her otherwise perfect face (645). Her birth-mark, "a crimson stain upon the snow," gives her husband grief as he attempts to find absolute physical perfection in his wife. The imperfect white of Georgiana's complexion and of the innkeeper's apron both represent the blemished nature of man.

Red, often associated with passion and evil, is also used as a symbol in character descriptions. The housekeeper Robin encounters as he searches for Major Molineux wears a scarlet petticoat. She tempts the young, naïve man with "sly freedom" from morality (612). As the red mark on Georgiana's face resembles imperfection, the red shade of scarlet in this instance represents compliance to mortal passions and to temptations of sin, obvious imperfections in the nature of man. Another use of the color of red, more striking than the last, is the red that corresponds with the black painted on the double-faced fellow: "the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning which attends them" (617). The fire and sword symbolize the consequences that follow compliance with sin—fires of hell awaiting sinners and the sword of justice hanging over wrongdoers—which precedes inevitable mourning. The double-faced fellow is a type of the devil, so his being associated with the color red is logical since Hawthorne's use of red expresses a devil essence, symbolizing sin and the consequence of sin that natural men fall under.

**Commented [E10]:** Does this sound okay?

**Commented [B11R10]:** I have mixed feelings. I mean, I like it but I had to read it twice to get how it was supposed to be read. Maybe if you made the man parallel? So it said "who man once honored he later tars and feathers, and man who once held honor willingly forsake it" also, I feel like it should be 'tarred and feathered' because the later makes it seem as though it's already occurred.

**Commented [B12]:** delete

Organic unity is achieved in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" through color symbolism in the descriptions of the characters. Grey symbolizes honor, so when men are stripped of it or strip themselves of it, honor is lost. White symbolizes purity, so when a man's white clothing is stained, his purity is tainted. Red symbolizes sin and the consequences of sin, so when two individuals don the color, they embody the symbolism themselves. All these color symbolisms lead to Hawthorne's desired effect, the gloomy tone that emphasizes the dark nature of man.

**Commented [B13]:** I like it, and yet it seems a little too summative (that's not a word, but it is now!) It's just such a restating of the paper, which obviously a conclusion should be....but still...

**Commented [B14]:** Maybe a : ?