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"Minister's Black Veil"

Hidden Sins

"The Minister's Black Veil", a literary masterpiece written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, was a divergent parable for the period it was written. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote as an anti-transcendentalist in the transcendentalist period; as a result, his view's in writings were mostly pessimistic considering his family's sinfulness. Hawthorne's grandfather was a judge in the Salem witch trails; for that reason, he was responsible for over twenty innocent deaths by mistrial. In addition, a reader can easily see the pessimism in his writing, and many hypothesize that his family's past has a part in his style. In the "The Minister's Black Veil", Hawthorne shows a great deal of pessimism through a minister who feels that he is too sinful to show his face. The minister, Mr. Hopper, has many hidden sins; furthermore, hidden sins is the main theme of the parable.

Hawthorne develops the theme of hidden sins through his main character, Mr. Hopper. Mr. Hopper, a minister, wears a black veil that resembles a man hiding his past sins. Many people do not understand or even accept the veil over his face. Hawthorne pictures the parson wearing the black veil and delivering his sermon along with a confused congregation including an elder woman who says, "'I don't like it,.....He has changed himself into something awful only by hiding his face'"(294). Others cry, "'Our parson is going mad'"(294)! The sermon in which he speaks that day is "...darker than usual..."(294), and also gives a gloomy feeling. The parson speaks of a secret sin; the audience soon relates the sermon to why he is wearing his black veil. The congregation feels that the sermon is given by someone else through Mr. Hopper's body. As a result, the minister's black veil is the talk of the town after the disturbing sermon.

In the next section of the parable, Mr. Hopper fronts the bewildered town at a funeral of a young lady. The parson is still wearing his black veil, even while he conducts the sermon for the funeral; however, the townspeople still thinks abstract thoughts about of their parson. The ladies of the town are exclaiming , "'The black veil, although it covers only the pastor's face, throws it's influences over the whole person, and makes him ghostlike from head to foot'"(296). Even one of the women at the funeral spoke, "'I had a fancy.....that the minister's and the maiden's spirits were walking hand in hand'"(297). The woman speaks of the parson as being ghostlike or even dead just because Hopper is wearing the mysterious black veil. Hawthorne shows this inhuman actions by writing, " The corpse had slightly shuttered, rustling the shroud and muslin cap, though the countenance retained the composure of death"(297). When the corpse feel the presence of the parson's sinful face, it moved or shuttered; furthermore, Hawthorne is showing the reader that the parson can encounter the dead with his mysterious black veil. Leaving the funeral, "...the beares went heavily forth, and the mourners followed"(296), but Mr. Hopper stood at the end of the crowd so he can remain unseen. Clearly, Hawthorne wants the reader to know that the minister does not fit with the rest of the town.

Also the wedding of a couple brought many others doubts to the mind of the people in the town because of the minister's controversial black veil. The couple hears of the parson's happiness and joyfulness, but since they heard of the black veil they "...awaited his arrival with impatience"(297); even though once confident in Hopper, the couple feels they want the minister not to arrive. Hawthorne describes their feelings in this quote, "...their eyes rested on the same horrible black veil, which had deeper gloom than the funeral"(295). The crowd mood changes, and all of a sudden this mysterious black veil once again bewilders the people attending the wedding that feel suddenly scared of his cloth hanging form his face. Many of the people become gloomy just of the presence of this horrific black veil, which shows the power of hidden sins within people. Towards the end of the wedding

a significant event happens in the development of the theme, when Mr. Hopper is taking a drink of his wine for celebration of the married, he suddenly sees his face in the glare. After seeing himself in the glare, he drops the glass; therefore, the significance of this states that he is scared of his own sinful face.

In spite of that, many of the townspeople feels bewildered and wondered by the black veil, there is one townspeople that says, "...there is nothing terrible in this piece of crape"(296). This special someone is the fiancée of the minister, Elizabeth, who speaks to her fiancée and asks why he is wearing it and why he does not take the veil off. Elizabeth is confused also, but does not show the dubiousness of herself as other do, most likely, because she is the fiancée of this troubled man. "Your words are a mystery too"(299), explains Elizabeth when she is telling hopper about the towns confusion and even her confusion. Hawthorne finally reveals the main theme of the story when Mr. Hopper finally confesses that he is wearing the veil because of morning of hidden sins.

His lost love, Elizabeth, is still ignorant of the motivation of the wearing of the black veil after the passage years, as well as the townspeople. Not only does Hawthorne display confused townspeople, he pictures other towns coming to gaze at the gloomy character whom is still wearing the mysterious black veil. In the Hopper's death bed he also faces the element of hidden sins once again. As he is getting older he feels doubt in his mind, and Reverend Clark is by his side. Reverend Clark once tries to take off the troubled veil, but still bothered by his hidden sins Mr. Hopper bursts out energetically, "Never"(303)! This shows Hawthorne is keeping Mr. Hopper stubborn about his beliefs even as he is getting closer to the minister's death.

The parable "The Minister's Black Veil" speaks of a hidden sin, which a man faces by covering his face with a terrible black veil. Although today is a much different society, there are still many examples of hidden sins in our society. The song "Unforgiven" by Metallica speaks of many hidden sins committed by an individual; even though Hawthorne's story and Metallica's song were written over one hundred years apart, they both tackle the gloomy subject of hidden sins. In like manner, hidden sins still catches the attention of eager audiences even after many years. Put simply, hidden sins are still prominent and have a strong grip on lives and society, perhaps for man's eternity.

