

The ministers black veil



In the short story "The Ministers Black Veil" by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Puritan citizens react to an unfamiliar practice with great distraught and hypocrisy. By choosing a dark colored veil, Hawthorne conveys his theme of secrecy and mystery with ease. However, this choice of symbolism also confuses and splits many readers as they try to discern the many different things that the black veil symbolizes. Because the Puritan people are both surprised and frightened by the unfamiliar veil the minister suddenly puts on, many of them begin to gossip amongst themselves, mentioning that the minister must be harboring some secret sin. As a veil that disguises the hidden sins of a Puritan, the veil itself becomes an object of both secrecy and hypocrisy. However, some of the citizens believe that the minister has simply lost his wits altogether. Despite this, all of the inhabitants continue to visit the services each time they are held. Contrary to the rest of the Puritans, the minister's fiancée Elizabeth refuses to be bothered by the veil at first, but the dishonesty the veil seems to resonate becomes too much for the girl and, because the minister swears to wear the veil for all eternity, she pleads with him to tell her why he wears it. The minister explains the countless symbols of the veil - an object to hide obscene sins, a screen of mourning, and finally a cloth of privacy. Not only does the veil hide his face as a symbol of a mask, but also he wears it to hide his most reluctant decisions, desires and secrets; the world is also hidden from him. The minister scorns the whole congregation in hiding themselves under their own secret "veils" from God and their peers. Mankind is afraid in committing and repenting their own sins.

As Hooper is dying, he asks that the others not judge him until they have examined their own consciences and found they are free of sin. With this, Hawthorne closes his story as though the ending itself were its own black veil. Hawthorne uses the mysterious black veil to convey many things, including the fickleness of the Puritans who refused to keep a relationship with the minister although his personality remained the same. Hidden sins, another symbol of the veil, are shown by Hawthorne to ruin special relationships, even the love between Elizabeth and the minister. The black veil, an obvious symbol has several different messages.

The veil teaches individuals to have courage and to abstain from arrogance. By shunning the mysterious and gossiping about their own minister, the Puritans contradicted their own mysterious God and their own beliefs; therefore, they were hypocrites of their own nature. By setting the veil upon the minister, Hawthorne showed that even the most revered of all may have sins of the darkest nature.