

Ministers black veil

Literature



The short story “ Ministers Black Veil” by Nathaniel Hawthorne has obvious parallels with his novel “ The Scarlett letter. ” Both of these works embody the theme of alienation from society as well as the outward representation of sin. As well as similar theme, the characterizations of the stories are the same. The minister in the short story, Mr. Hooper, represents his sin by placing a black veil over his face while the main character in the Scarlett Letter, Hester Prynne, wears an “ A” on her clothing.

Although both of the symbols represent sin, the characters have different reasons for wearing them. Another parallel between the two stories is the community surrounding these characters, both puritan and conservative societies who frown upon the exploitation of their sins. The characters are ostracized as a result. The similarities between Hawthorne’s two pieces expose his unique style and the recurring theme of representation of sin. The veil in “ The Minister Black Veil” acts as a symbol of secret sin. Mr. Hooper will not tell anyone why he is wearing it or what he is hiding, not even his wife.

The minister explains to his wife that, “ The dismal shade must separate me from the world; Even you, Elizabeth, can never come behind it “(1045). What is even more unsettling to the community he resides in is that he is a Pastor. “ He has changed himself into something awful, only by hiding his face,” one of Mr. Hoopers peers explained (1042). The symbol of sin, the veil or the fabric A, defines the sinner. Just as, the symbol of the scarlett A defined Hester among her peers in Hawthorne’s novel. Why is it that Hawthorne chooses to display his characters sins to be seen so clearly by others?

Is he trying to portray that one cannot hide from his or her wrong doings? Although it is arguable that Hawthorne is trying to express the cliché “ don't judge a book by its cover” motif, I interpreted it as his way of saying that everyone is a sinner. Mr. Hooper may have chosen to wear the black veil to teach the people of his community that nobody is the perfect Christian. This theme could be representative of Hawthorne's own strict religious upbringing, and his dissatisfaction with the Christian expectations.

In “ The Ministers Black Veil”, Mr. Hooper became the gossip of everyone in town, even among the children walking to school (Page 1044). His wife was even affected by the town's rumors, so much so that she insisted on leaving him if he didn't show her what he was hiding behind the veil. “ Mr. Hooper smiled to think that only a material emblem had separated him from happiness (Page 1046). ” Hawthorne is indicating that, in fact, Mr. Hooper is acting as a lesson for the people of his town.

When the narrator says, “ By the aid of his mysterious emblem – for there was no other apparent cause – he became a man of awful power over souls that were in agony for sin (1047). He also implies that the people are discomforted because Mr. Hooper is a reminder of sins they have committed and are ashamed of. The minister continued with his sermons and masses the same he always did, but because he is wearing a symbol of sin, he is no longer the same. The implication that he has sinned is enough for people to turn their back on him. The parallel seen in “ The Scarlett Letter” is almost identical. Hester Prynne becomes the topic of the towns gossip because of the A she is wearing on her chest.

Through reading “ The Minister’s Black Veil” and using my knowledge of “ The Scarlet Letter”, I noticed Nathaniel Hawthorne’s unique style of portraying sins and his recurring themes. Even though the characters in the story, Hester Prynne and Mr. Hooper, have different reason for displaying their sins, the overall message is the same. Hawthorne is relaying to the reader that not everyone is perfect and every one is capable of sin. The significant similarities in these stories support the conclusion that this was a major influence in his writing.